

The

Australia's magazine of the performing arts

November 1977 \$1.95

Theatre Australia

Interview: Robin Ramsay

Jim McNeil's *Jack*

Two Macbeths

Louis Esson

National Guide

Comprehensive review section
including film,
ballet, opera, &c.



Mrs Rosinaquet meets the Bastard from the Bush

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SEASON TWO 1977

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
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MACBETH

by William Shakespeare

A HAPPY AND HOLY OCCASION
by John O'Donoghue

ADVENTURE IN THE DEEP

presented by the Magpie
Theatre-in-Education Company





Theatre

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COMMENT

Worn a peded, crushed-silvet, burgundy curtain, Gordon Chater sits with only a thin smile between him and the opening moments of *Boyzn Franklin*. Hundreds of telegrams, looking like a bad malling job speak strongly of success while Gordon charronises the programme-advertised. Don'ts and 'bans' his name at the London transfer through the fog of the dressing room.

It has been known for some time that the play had been bought — and he, without a trace of pride, wished it well — but now has to go to, a triumphant return after thirty-one years, during which time he has "never thought of myself in anything but Australian".

Other following names are still pulled into the air on who's to play the ageing transvestite in New York — George C Scott, Richard Burton, Orson Welles — but their ankles present desperate quickly and the air is closer again. Close enough to see Gordon Chater on Broadway? Hal Prince and Stephen Sondheim, no doubt, will be shocked at the news. Mrs Prince is quoted as saying to Hal "this guy has got to do it in New York — he's destined to be national".

Gordon (self-effacing as always) remarked that Steve Rogers was "putting himself down by saying the play deserved, a proper London and New York, in the shade of a 'local' appearing nude on stage", a bony of words for the play, and Chater, would suggest this as true.

Shortly *TF* will be publishing the personal reminiscences of the man on whose shoulders the remarkable first pair of *Boyzn Franklin* has rested — from the moment he first read the script, compactly, straight through, to the news of the London engagement.

Not far away, *King Brookline* is anticipated in a much more opulent room, where only a few aches, a record cover and a decorated mirror interrupt the plain wood-paneling and expensive desk, testy to the success of *A Chorus Line* and *The Twang* and *All That Jazz*. The office is in the Comedy Theatre, where *Whist in the Dark* is again proving the commercial potential of the local product, not far from Her Majesty's to which *A Chorus Line* will shortly transfer, and where *Frankie* was recalled under the *ICW* banner after being spurned on the faith and cash of its transvestite notion writers at the tiny Avesa Theatre. That too is to follow in the footstep of *Boyzn Franklin* to London, and again it is the whole package which is to go.

Across in North Melbourne *Boyzn* Austin, the charming, year-accommodating

pathetic lady of the MTC, finds only enough chutz to see Robin Ramsay and the Editors for an interview in the enormous, accomplished warehouse the company has taken over. Ramsay the ever-gentlemanly young actor who has already tackled West End and Broadway success, proffers his chair (as did the balloon there) but to no avail.

He does, with the elaborate recording gadget and the tatty stacking-rack looking wholly incongruous in the great, empty expanse.

Why, we wonder, thinking of a similar building the Old Tote has in Albury, do the auto-companies go in for these most unheroic facades?

Ramsay, in the article in this month's *Stage*, modestly remains on the spot. *The Twang* began as a late show with neither subsidy nor big backing, and *Boyzn Franklin* at the National, which Mike Creditt of Equity has recently described as only entering "for a necessary intermission". True, the last success to visit *Boyzn Franklin* is informative and sobering. *The Desi*, begun at what was to become the largest state company — but that was a long time ago.

Increasingly notorious needs for subsidy by companies gobbling as many of the regions in their capitals as they can seems to bear no relation to success attained. At the same time the commercial theatre is selling off its inner city theatres. *Boyzn* is arguably the only thing which bears this relation to company size.

Still, the latest addition to the *TF* is *Monopoly*-like but though the property itself has not exactly tested with popular acceptance, has given rise to the hands of one of the best young Australian directors around, in their different ways, Ian Sharman and Ross Cramphorn. If anyone can inject stability and set routine what was coming to look increasingly white and elephantine (like Seymour Centre), it is they, and with Heseltine, Neeson and White already announced, together with Sheppard and Head, everything augurs well for an exhilarating season.

Back in Melbourne, people still look for the money to ensure that the Playbox Theatre can be more than just a venue for other productions. Graeme Blundell and Carlyle Gasson got little positive response from the Australian Council — two moderate successes (surprisingly good, considering they were on the books of the disastrous MTC) but with Grant Sleath are not sufficient open seasons to government coffers. Yet the smaller breeding grounds of the moment seem to make for the bigger fish.

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David Gyger talks to Peter Hemmings, new general manager of the Australian Opera.

Peter Hemmings, the new general manager of the Australian Opera, is strikingly unlike his predecessor, John Winter — a Dame and a parent, whose wife is an opera singer.

There is none of Winter's stately Nordic charm about his successor, he ought to be a dear Scot, as beauteous and tweedy as his master, but is in fact an Englishman by birth, his connection with Scotland came later on, when he became the man at the helm of Scottish Opera in a burgeoning 15 year managerial stint from its inception in 1962 until he resigned to come to Australia. One knows from the official biographical data put out by the AO that he has a wife and two children, but they do not enter the conversation, we are listening deep in the bowels of the Opera House.

One knows from behind the scenes that he is far from without pluck for the future of the Australian Opera even now, and has track record for innovation and box office success in Scotland matching the expectation that existing trends in part over the horizon for his new charge, but Peter Hemmings is playing his cards very close to the chest just now, for we are talking several weeks in advance of his official assumption of power.

Scottish National Opera started in 1962, by results, with a one-week season in Glasgow. In its first few years growth was slow, by 1966 it was only playing a fortnight in Glasgow, with shorter seasons in Perth, Aberdeen and Edinburgh. Till 1973 it was almost permanently on tour. But now a bit of own house — the Theatre Royal at Glasgow where this past it is playing for 20 weeks, doing four or five performances of eight of 10 operas on subscription. In addition, it is having a one-week season in Edinburgh, two weeks in Aberdeen and six weeks in four of other centres in Scotland and northern England. The company now has 180 permanent employees, and will give 135 performances in 1977.



"The big difference is that in Scotland we allocate operas to orchestras, and avoid having to require two different orchestras to learn the same opera," says Hemmings, thus, without saying a word, obviously efficacious has attention to the Australian scene. And a gap suddenly opens in the following ranks: choosing the future, or perhaps the past?

"I feel the whole orchestral basis with the Australian Opera needs a great deal of thought," he says. "I'd like to get to the stage where rehearsal is the exception rather than the rule."

"With careful planning of repertory, continual change of orchestral forces ought to be possible — even desirable," he says. So perhaps the 1980 could do all performances of one opera and the CMO all performances of another? Unless there was one opera circulating long enough so it could be split."

But what about the old bugbear of audience travel?

"My experience is that people in opera enjoy the stimulus of different audiences," says Hemmings. "But they do not enjoy being away from home a great deal."

And doesn't the prospect of more touring for the AO — a more adequate fulfillment of its national role — inevitably raise the question: prospect of fewer performances, shorter seasons, at the Sydney Opera House? After all, there are only a fixed number of days in the year and the

AO is not exactly under-contracted even now.

"With a bit of increase at present," says Hemmings thoughtfully, "I think it's possible for the Australian Opera to serve both functions." He is picking his words carefully, but clearly he is not caught off balance by the problem. "I would say," he continues, "that the Sydney Opera House was built as a means of providing open and ballot work at all the year in Sydney. In most if not all cases it is open company with open and ballot.

"Already the Australian Opera gives 110 opera performances a year at the Opera House, with strict planning, it will be possible to increase output — provided we get the resources required to enable the company to fulfil its national function adequately."

And what about the thorny question of repertory that bedevils every opera company in the world but has been a particular bone of contention for the AO in recent years, with some patrons jumping up and down angrily and/or cancelling their subscriptions, because of the inclusion of works like Stravinsky's *Rite of Passage* and Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*, while others complain the AO has its feet stuck too firmly in the mud of the 18th and 19th centuries — Mozart, Verdi, Puccini, Donizetti and that sort?

"I agree with John Winter's policy of repertory development," says Hemmings, but adds, without a pause: "But you must take the public along with you. The standard modern repertory — Stravinsky, Berg, Janáček — is essential." But one must always play the classics.

"It is a question of encouraging subscriptions and then compensating without putting them off. My long experience about random opera is that it is wise to budget for small audiences." And then he adds almost to himself, "One of the great tragedies is that so many modern compositions touch with audiences that in recent years in Britain some contemporary composers — Britten, Tippett — have been drawing reasonably well, and given that I can't see why Australian composers shouldn't gain similar popularity."

Does this mean that new and Australian works would be put on subscription even at the risk of losing some of the more conservative subscribers?

"I would like to see everything on subscription," says Hemmings, "only very occasional non-subscription performances. A city like Sydney should be able to find a regular audience for new works — be able to sell out a few performances."

QUOTES & QUESTIONS



The cast: Miss Montague meets The Bachelor from the Bush, or Patrick White meets Henry Lawson. Kate Piprell and Robin Ramsay photographed for TA by Bruce Brooks

WHITE A WINNER

SIRANT BEWETTE, J.C. Williamson Productions: "As we expected the *Tom* has caused controversy in Melbourne. Some people love it, others hate it. It is a fine class play and has transferred well to the Comedy Theatre. Big Tops is J. C. Williamson Productions first Australian play and we are hoping for the success we achieved with *The Bachelor* and *All That Jazz* — our first Australian musical. Our policy is to entertain and any product that does this and has good commercial potential is of interest to us. I hope more comes from Australian sources."

COP OUT

CLIFF GREEN: "Cop Out!, opening at the Russell Street in late November, is my first stage play. I enjoyed writing it immensely. Every journalist wants to be a novelist, every stage playwright wants to write for television, so of course every screen writer wants to write for the stage."

"It's set in a television production house making a pilot show. So I'm padding about on what are — for me — rather familiar paddles. The play moves on as the television coverage factors in rather heavily, but there is nothing personal in it. TV has been very kind to me. By and large I've let do pretty much what I like. It's the system I'm attacking, not the individual vice presidents of networks."

"I hope everyone connected with the industry — including the writers — have a good laugh. But I think they might squirm in their seats a little too."

QUEENSLANDERS

ALAN FERRELLS, Artistic Director, QTC: "Our latest foray into the country have been three fold. We sent a team of four actor/teachers to Charleville for a week to work with the children of the area. They gave many workshops with them and also classes with both primary and secondary school children in the area. It looks likely that this will become a permanent feature of our operation. Why Not Say *For Australia*, which we are presenting in association with the Queensland Arts Council continues its extremely successful tour. Our Project Spreadsheet team is working on Andrew Ure's play *Noah* with local youth groups in the Mackay and Hervey Bay areas. This is an exciting and innovative idea which received the financial support of the Schools Commission. Repairs have been undertaken and highly commended the standard of work these young Queenslanders are achieving. We are currently planning our 1979 activities. The State Government grant to the QTC, of \$257,000, an increase of \$39,000 will enable us to realize many of our existing ideas."



HOOPLA'S FIRST HALF YEAR

GRIMMIE BLINNELL, Hoopla Productions: "We have not been definitely turned down by the Australia Council for what is called a 'continuing' grant. In spite of the fact that we have State subsidy and a proper venue, not to mention our artistic qualifications, they say that if they gave us money they would have to give it to X and X other companies. So we have now

applied for a 'special projects' grant, and we should know the results of that in December. But even if we don't get it, we'll still go ahead somewhere. The Late Night season is now underway with James' *Breakfast* and the Downunder Supper Show will be running from 3rd to 26th November with Bruce Mylne playing him right in *Breakfast's Last Play*."

"The first of our readings, sponsored by The Age started on 16 October with Ted Nelson's *Let Me Be* and continues on 30 November with *The Suspicious Disappearance of the Cultured Daughter* by John Lee. In January, instead of the usual two-day old pantomimes children will be able to see Ross Mervington's *Patrol's Mac Team*, Richard Bradshaw's *Shadow Puppets* and the *Wiggles Show* and *Ship in Wondertown* in four performances a day. Then on the Playbox in early February Adam Falzon will be directing *Rock on* with John Watson and myself as half the cast.

"Now, we're alive and well and determined to be with us whatever may."

DESIGN EXHIBITION

KIM CAMPBELL, The Designers Association in the Performing Arts: "The Designers Association in the Performing Arts has just been reformed after having been in abeyance for some time. Initially the Association aims to promote and protect the role of the designer in theatre, TV and cinema and to heighten both professional and public appreciation of their work. The Association is based in Sydney with a committee of ten headed by Anne Fraser as president and Alison Lee as secretary."

"The current membership comprises fifty designers from around Australia. One of our State projects will be a representative exhibition of designs sponsored by the Sydney Opera House Trust in the Elizabeth Hall of the Sydney Opera House during April and May 1979."

BUT WHO WILLIAMSON FOR OIL LIAISONG?

PAUL RHINFALLO, J.L. Williamson Productions: "So far our search for new Australian plays and musicals has been rather disappointing. We have had quite a few scripts from one and amateur writers who are hopeful, but we have not had anything submitted by established writers, which is what we really want. We are looking for material like the Wilkinses, the Basins, the good people."

"I have spoken to the Writers' Guild and the Producers' and Directors' Guild

and asked them to encourage writers, but nothing has happened; perhaps they still will. I suggested to Bob Ellis that *The Times* in *For You Again* is still trying to be given musical treatments, and who better to do it than him — we had tremendous financial and critical success with the commercial production of *The Legend Of Lucy O'Malley* — but he is writing a film at the moment and I don't know whether he has done anything about it.

starved local event postponing some of their own shows to help us out. That is where the present signs.

Support from other local organisations was mostly minimal. Assistance of local Melbournians was as good as all. Administration by outside theatre people was almost nil. Spared over five nights less than 400 people came, 200 odd of them were our own friends and contacts, the others from cast and crew contacts. Paid advertising was a complete waste of money.

No critics at all came from the *Melbournian Daily*, despite complimentary tickets for several review nights. To my knowledge only one critic came, and at the end, the Editor of the *Warrington paper*, *Forward Silver Thread*, who was generous (or perceptive?) enough to describe the musical as "without doubt the most important development in local theatre musically for many years."

The startling fact is that the lack of local and Australian income prompts not to use the recording made from the show just for publicity overseas, is a priority to retaining the writing and marketing of an English and world-known musical which I allowed to be interrupted for the sake of my apparently uninterested fellow-Australians. I present to local theatres, both more reliable contacts and a much more sophisticated audience to draw from.

One aim of producing *Castley or Melbourn* was to give it a typical try out with what should have been an amateur audience, getting comments from critics, then sending it back into workshop again, for a wider Sydney or Australian audience. However, outside of our enthusiastic group they would appear to be interested at all. What a waste of material potential for the enrichment of an almost nonexistent Australian Heritage Musical Theatre.

Neil Hayes,
Melbourn, NSW

Letters

Your correspondent, Jacqueline Roth ("Quotient and Quotient," August 1977) shows little gratitude for the grant received by the Peter Sellars/Simon Foundation from the New South Wales Premier's Department through the Cultural Grants Advisory Council for the Alan Schneider Workshop. In actual fact, the Advisory Council in an effort to help what they thought would be a worthwhile project accepted an application from the Foundation months after the closing date — contrary to their otherwise rigid rule that late entries will not be considered.

The Advisory Council was aware that the Advisory Council would offer some financial assistance and of course it was expected that the Foundation would also make a contribution.

Out of a total budget for the Workshop of \$6,000, the grant awarded by the New South Wales Government was \$2,000 — and her comment that "The NSW Government have supported it immensely" is therefore not only misleading but most unfair.

John Clark
Chairman
Cultural Grants Advisory Council
NSW

Your August letter mentions forthcoming articles on Australian musical and regional theatre. May I illustrate some down to earth aspects of the subject from my very recent experience with the new musical-and-a-theatre, *Castley or Melbourn*.

Many people of various allegiances know about the project, which was specifically for Melbourn Central Year 1977. Many people offered to help, but few did.

No local people at all came to the advertised auditions and hardly anyone else, with one talented exception, who joined our cast, but our friends in a few local theatre groups were absolutely

starved local event postponing some of their own shows to help us out. That is where the present signs.

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Neil Hayes,
Melbourn, NSW

In his recent review of the *Alexandra Theatre Company's The Cherry Orchard*, Jack Hibberd makes a brief but curious detour. Diverging from the measurement of the director, he makes a disturbingly unacceptable attack upon the newly established Victorian College of the Arts, School of Drama.

While admitting that it is "naturally much too early to pass judgement on this institution", Hibberd then proceeds to do just that, by actually cataloguing the "distressing anomalies" he alleges are in current circulation.

With his first ramour Hibberd claims "that the central full-time staff is mainly English or cultural creatures". In fact, there are only three full-time English staff members and five full-time Australians. All the part-time staff are Australians. It would be wrong, however, to assume that logic is what Hibberd is on about. He is concerned (and rightly so) about the foreign cultural hegemony which reappears on the development of an Australian theatre.

In this regard it is not so much the staff

make up, but the philosophy which determines the school's direction. This philosophy has a very strong Australian base. In particular, it states the need for the development of community theatre groups and says that serve the people rather than just the three per cent who currently comprise Australian audiences. It should be said that in this school theatre is not regarded as a self-existent "good-thing", but as a means to stimulate thought and effect change.

He suggests that the first year project, the translation into dramatic form of elements of Xavier Herbert's *Pearl Fellow: My Country* was taken, is to deny an experience which is never mapped on the audience. It is fundamental that we as Australians recognise that there are deep social and political problems in this country, and that we attempt to define them before proceeding to build an Australian theatre.

In *Pearl Fellow* Herbert posed problems of identity. This for community theatre workers is of crucial importance at the first major hurdle in this field is "identification" with the people we are working for. In attempting the dramatisation of the novel was not indicative of the real learning that was an.

The final ramour that Hibberd circulated is that "part of the second year course coincides with production of *Manjimup* by the Dean of the School (*Peter O'Toole*). Even if this were true (which it isn't) we fail to see what he's going at".

After the experience of *Pearl Fellow* the need was felt to work on a play that had deep subject — something which we as never accepted but had unfortunately failed to find in our own play. Also we wished to work on an established text so as to consolidate the acting and technical processes we had been through. We broke up into four groups. Each group chose one act of a *Cocteau*, *Molier*, *Pinter* or *Beaumarchais* play and spent six weeks (four afternoons a week) working it. From our point of view the project as a learning experience was very rewarding.

Beyond this, second year is totally devoted to the development of rough theatre skills (guggling, acrobatics, magic, singing, rap, etc.) and on the scripting and rehearsing of group-directed shows for pubs, factories, the streets, schools etc., all very necessary for the development of a truly community theatre.

On a personal level, we believe that theatre can be a sensitising weapon for change in a society which is still largely dominated by an "I'm all right Jack" fascist mentality.

Hibberd's much-admiring does not in any way help combat this mentality when it serves only to cast suspicion on a school which we hope in years to come will have a major impact on Australian theatre and society.

Robert Penrice
Phil Sharman
Second-Year Students
The Victorian College of the Arts,
School of Drama

Ray Stanley's

WHISPERS RUMOURS & FACTS



Looks as if next year could be Australian Year in London. In new scenes definite Reg Livermore in *The Born Stink*, Roger Follett will be there at the beginning of the year, Stephen Chater in *The Abolition of Slavery*, Franklin about March and *The Turners* and *All That Jazz* presented by Michael Codron at the Menier in April. Believe the rights to *Our*? Williamson's Joe Club have also been sold for London and don't Paul Dean suggest he would be touring an Old Vic company overseas?

After the success of the 1977 International Music Theatre Festival in Sydney understand there'll be a second forum in 1978 — called Sydney International Theatre Arts Forum, or SITAF for short. Apparently people like Tim Gobbo, Franco Zeffirelli, Peter Robinson, Bob Fossey, Richard Rodgers, Leonard Bernstein and Giacomo Menotti have all been invited. With the Playwrights' Conference being held annually in Canberra, one wonders when Melbourne will jump on the bandwagon with some cultural 'Yes, I am aware there's always *Mozartia!*' Anyway the Victoria State Opera Company is managing a marked bill of Gladys 21, and that sounds as if it could be.

Reverting back to the Playwrights' Conference understand Michael Ridgeon is to be Artistic Director and our wacky editor Rob Page, has now been elected vice-chairman of the Conference. At this date no play has been invited as chairman. In fact too, the Conference will have a two per cent royalty stake in any plays developed there which make off further.

At 13, Anna Neagle epitomises the West End in a musical version of James Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows*, entitled *Stage*. Eric Duri tells me he's going

to bring Steven Berkoff in his own play *Fiat* to Australia next year. Max Gillies chalking up his 100th performance in *A Streetcar of the Amazons* in Hobart in November. Believe there's a strong possibility magazine *Ice Bucket* (who's taping 72 episodes of "Ice Bucket's Magic Bag" to be seen on the ABC next year) will be playing Aladdin to Lee Trevi' Star Stan Mavri's *Shadow Twinkley*.

A very salutary party given in Melbourne to celebrate the first anniversary of Narroff's production of *The Abolition of Slavery*. Franklin. The 15 or so people around the table included Gordon Cleaver, Steve J. Spurio, William Hussey, Paul Her, Betty Fouquer, all the stage staff concerned with the production and a handful of media folk. Don't think it was generally known, but Paul Her (who's married a tree were general manager) decided on his 40th day was the first anniversary of his arrival in Australia. Paul makes a trip back to England for a month soon. Michael Bennett, who conceived, choreographed and directed *A Chorus Line*, apparently is getting about US \$200,000 per week gross income from the musical. Figure includes seven per cent from the Sydney production.

Hear Helen Mirren could be playing the role Susan Hampshire had in the London production of Somerset Maugham's *The Circle* when it tour here next year with George Withers and John MacCormick. The London production was originally a transfer from the Chichester Festival Theatre, so wonder why the Australian Fibretheatre Theatre Trust are making money out of Australian presentation and not the Chichester Festival Theatre proper's tour, which is being sponsored by

Robert Sturges, J.C. Williamson Productions and Michael Edgley International.

Believe though the Trust will have a quarter share in Somers' production of *The Fish* when it transfers to the Theatre Royal about next February. Michael Edgley's next block buster acquisition will be early in the New Year when he'll bring the *Moorside Circus* at £100,000.

One Helga and Peter Fenne, the Melbourne team responsible for several musicals (particularly children's) over the years, are now translating that residence to Sydney. Peter tells me their latest musical, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, will be staged at the Alexander Theatre next January (there's also the possibility of another being presented in Sydney and quite likely another one of their children's musicals will be performed throughout the country around the same time). My mention in my August issue of a rumor that one of our national directors intends retiring next year I am now pleased to definitely not do. A long and overseas probably but certainly nothing more. Is it the Australian Ballet or the Australian Opera Company I wonder, which is considering doing its own version of *A Prince in the Winding Rock*?

Problems that some of the national companies' origins of Melbourne are up against was highlighted to me when someone from Britain mentioned as reason for not frequently seeing the Queensland Theatre Company productions the over-expensiveness of travel, i.e. taking the same people again and again often giving similar performances.

Although it has touring for about a year, *The Soap Box Circus* goes into the Prahran Factory for the first time in November, for the APG's Christmas Show.

The first \$1,000 Armstrong-Morris Scholarship goes to assist in providing advanced overseas musical education for its recipient will be awarded to one of six finalists on 22 January 1978 in the concert hall of the Sydney Opera House.

News of Australians in England: Peter Brown, 16, of the QTC, at Stratford-on-the-Ham, has joined the company at Stratford East for the season. Michael Stanfield (English, but he was in the Melbourne theatre restaurant, *poached remoulade*) is playing the boy who loves himself in *A Chorus Line*.

Peter O'Malley in the Oxford Playhouse Company's *You Never Can Tell*. Rob Harvey has just directed an Antitobac play at ICA and is contemplating a trip home to show off his second child. Lesley Tanner and Dennis Chasen are with the RSC at the Aldwych.

John Jago is in the Chichester season. Mandie of the RSC with the company which it tours here next year.



Tracks & Ways

Robin Ramsay in interview with *Theatre Australia* traces the paths which have led him to Broadway fame, TV mass recognition and back to the Australian boards and his farm at Bega.

"I've followed all my tracks and ways from old bark school to Leicester Square. I've been right back to boyhood days, and found no light or pleasure there."

So said Henry Lawson, that Australian of all Australian figures, when Robin Ramsay, one of our best internationally known actors, is portraying such right for the Melbourne Theatre Company. Ramsay has taken a selection of Lawson's songs, poems, letters and narratives and, under the direction of Rodney Fisher, has woven them into an evening that evokes turn-of-the-century Australia, England, alcoholism, impersonation and poverty. They are the lesser known works, a combination of which does not give the more usual, sentimental view of Lawson, and through which Ramsay portrays some

of Lawson's characters as well as the man himself.

Notwell Hawthorne and in relation to Lawson that there is a fidelity "which almost invariably compels human beings to bring around and have, glancing, the spot where some great and marked event has given colour to their lifetime".

Robin Ramsay has known success in America, London and Japan, and yet he has returned to live and work in Australia. Like Lawson, part of the reason for this is a deep love for the country with the Australian bush and living close to the land, he has built himself a house at Bega where he retired when not working, and lives on his chickens and vegetables, working on an oyster farm. Recently he worked as a theatre consultant to the South Australian Arts Council in order to

be able to spend time in the bush, in a way of life that is almost totally opposite to that of the actor facing the crowds each night.

The life of an actor was suggested to Ramsay by Dr Dooling, the headmaster of Colding Grammar, where his theatrical performances received more acclaim than his academic ones. His parents left for England when he was sixteen. Robin "lugged abag, sold a bit of a fib about my age, auditioned for RADA and got in".

It was a pretty overwhelming experience with people like Peter O'Toole and Albert Finney in the years ahead of him, but an excellent place to gain experience, which he also did by working at the Chelsea Palace with the hyperbolic comedian Max Miller as understudy.

His return to Australia in Australia



after that was simply to avoid being caught up in the Cyprus trouble, but after doing his national service here he joined the pioneer professional theatre company, the Union Repertory Company under John Sumner.

"At that stage it was the only place in Australia where actors could earn any money — apart from what was known in the Melbourne slums, eleven rather sordid actors who used to do all the radio shows. We were a very young company. Peter Cook and I were ASMs, she was twenty-five and I was eighteen. There was Zor Caldwell and George Ogilvie, and Win Roberts was the old man of the company at thirty-three."

In 1962 Robert Ramsey left for America — "I had an American wife at the time, which meant I could work there" — partly because at that point he felt unable to relate to an Australian way of life. "I was a very reticent person in those days, and there were all those huge actors, verminous and drunkards, and I didn't know where and couldn't cope. I really left out of it."

He had also left the Union Rep to work at the then Adelphi Festival, and found on his return that another actor had stepped into the position he had left, and he was left doing the walk-on. "I had a job of nothing at the time I couldn't do what I

wanted to do here, the AETT had started, but I couldn't even get an interview as there were too many people there like Neil Fitzpatrick, so I decided to go to America."

America did turn out to be something of a land of opportunity, for after landing up in Texas, staying with a cousin and no money, and experiencing the delights of the YMCA, Ramsey got a job in a restaurant as night as he could audition during the day — "the great thing about New York was that you could see two hundred people a day about jobs" — and joined the National Repertory Theatre very quickly.

They toured throughout America with professionals like Tyrone Guthrie's Man Stewart and Elizabeth the Queen, and then Robert returned to the Theatre Company of Boston. "That's where I first did my Laurence, with a whole collage of Australian things, to make money. Universities there will pay for anything a bit different; they'd have Bertolt Brecht one night, Paul Crouch the next and me the next."

When work finished in Boston, Ramsey went back to New York and met up with Harry Humphreys whom he'd known in Australia. Humphreys was just leaving the part of the underplotter he'd been playing in *Oliver*, with that with the understanding to do the part of Fagin, and Robin mapped into both

At that point David Merrick wanted the rights to *Mister Sand* and Peter Brook wanted *Clown*, Russell, who was playing Fagin, so they did a swap and at the age of twenty-four Robert Ramsey started playing Fagin on Broadway. As luck would have it, the casting director was also replaced just then, and the new one didn't realise that his Fagin was not the right age so he was kept on for two years.

It was an extraordinary two years for a young, Melbourne-born actor, and included doing stage like mugging a couple of numbers from *Oliver* on the *Ed Sullivan Show* when the Beatles were on it, to an audience of 40,000,000 viewers — "The Beatles wanted my autograph" — but towards the end of it he felt the need for further development and returned once again to Australia in the hope of new opportunities.

He went back to home ground first and did a lot of work with George Ogilvie in what had become at this stage the Melbourne Theatre Company. Other professional companies had also come into being, and the production of *How Could You Believe Me?* — John Bell's adaptation of the Goldoni *Servants of Two Masters* was quite a new detection for the Old Tote. Drew Forsythe, John Geddes and Robyn Nevin were in the cast, something wonderful was happening then

Shylock



How strange the Tote didn't let us go further — in fact I was disappointed last year when I did *The Way*, and in the gods opening they didn't even let the play into everything else the Tote had done. As if they were ashamed of it."

With that particular new direction failing to take root — at least at the Tote — Ramsay launched himself into television, sitting in *Charles Dickens in Bedhead*, and becoming a household name. His felt that an actor should always be expanding in his own veins all directions and that learning to work in a new medium is the way of doing that.

Playing *Portia Palms* at the rock concert *Jesus Christ Superstar* gave him another chance to do this by working with people who were not primarily actors. The experience of vital young talents — which in this case included Jim Sturman — has also proved immensely stimulating. "Jim was very different with ACS than when I played *Macbeth* in the Therapeutic Opera, which was a stunning thing to do. But this was a company that you wished could have gone on and done other things."

A company that did go on and do other things was *Neatool*, and Ramsay was impressed by the way everyone in the production was involved in every part of *Macbeth*. Toren, even redesigning the set with Larry Eastwood and Richard

Wherrett. He would very much like to work with Max Gillies and other APG actors whom he really admires, but modestly explains "I wouldn't want to clean dishes for an architect to see if they class me as an actor. When you're close one's apprenticeship than are other things."

Ramsay has "the body thing about acting", (although he thinks "the rough and the holy often go together" in an *Jesus Christ Superstar*) and feels that for him personally doing commercials is somehow antriegating to talent. But he admits it is only good form that has allowed him not to be pressurised in that way.

When work is scarce he retreats to sleep because "there doesn't seem any point in doing something as an actor that you're not yet ready for or that you've gone beyond. That doesn't necessarily mean that you must only do the great writers, not all I'm doing. *Rock* or *for Neatool* because it has a special quality."

The special quality of Australian theatre is something Ramsay strongly believes in, a quality that he feels is enhanced by David Williamson's recent direction of *47 My Sons* at the SATC. "It had a much more lively, taught audience" — that English Rep style which is being perpetuated by "directors of second rate English provincial theatres being appointed to run our companies". It is this

theatremanship personally that Ramsay has very grudge against, but the situation that is allowed to exist whereby English directors are being centrally appointed to stage theatre companies.

"In Perth the director of the Haremeyer Roy has taken over, now we have a chain sweep of English directors all over Australia. I don't think we should fire Sonnen and Alan Edwards, but it's a shame that in Australia we should just have brought in an English director who starts his English role, has an English designer and an Englishman running the youth theatre". The idea of exchanging artists between countries is more than acceptable, but straight imports to Australia is just no longer on.

The small and varied work he has done in other countries would seem to have taken as the place in avoiding the versatility and polishing the talents of Robin Ramsay, in a balanced way that has allowed him to make use of it without being reduced by it. His tracks have led him back to Australia, the bush and the theatrical medium, between which later two he leads a life balanced as extremes, the one recharging a capacity for the other.

"But, every dream and every track — and there were many that I have —

"They all lead on, as they lead back, to Perth in *Neatool* and now."

Louis

Esson



By the time that Louis Esson's play, *The Time is Not Yet* had been performed for the first time on 23 July 1912, the thirty-three year old author had made a name for himself as an Australian playwright. Later he was to be the main person concerned in the formation of the Pioneer Players, the first group of Australians to write and act only plays written by Australians about Australians. They performed twenty plays between May 1929 and June 1936, five of which were three act plays. Yet none of the four plays which Esson wrote for the Players was to receive the acclaim which was given

to *The Time is Not Yet*. After Esson's death produced by Gregor McMahon of the Melbourne Repertory Company at the Athenaeum Theatre in 1912. It played to a packed house which included the Prime Minister of the time, Andrew Fisher.

Strangely enough, the play was not performed again until 1973 when it was staged at the Melbourne Union Theatre by students of Trinity College and Joan Clarke Hall. Louis Esson's granddaughter, Kathy Esson, played the leading role of Doris.

A newspaper review published in the *Australian* of 26 June 1912 by Katherine

Bridges commented on "the astonishing quality of the play and the absolutely up-to-date perspective of the writing". She quoted an old enough the representative of a Chicago syndicate, Mr Hall, who wants to buy up the Northern Territory and "develop the country, bring it up to date, Americanise it" but who needs "certain concessions" (Act I, p8). Another was the their accountant, Hughes who tells his management friend

"They've got houses outside and their backs are always against the wall. A long drought and induced depression, that's what Australia needs" (Act II Sc 1, p18).

These are other aspects of the play which suggest that people in Australia are still concerned with many of the same issues as in Esson's day. Lady Halsbury declares when Doris is asked to stand for parliament:

"We cannot have been kept down for too long by state officials... All we need is more opportunity to display our worth. That is why I never allow my husband to make up his mind on any public question before he has consulted me" (Act II, p6).

This also reminds us that Esson was writing at a time when Australia led the world in giving women the vote and introducing compulsory adult franchises. The Prime Minister's very English brother declares, "Australia is the only country where the peasants make the law" (Act IV, p24), and the member for parliament Hopkins, a sceptic, replies, "This is the country of the satisfied working man" (Act II, p19).

Although Esson balances the scales equally between the left and the right in politics by satirising both in the play and his conclusion seems to be that "the time is not yet ripe" for socialism, it was at this time that he was contributing articles to the Melbourne *Socialist*. Among these was a verse lampooning capitalist personified as "The Suck King" (the title) which was published in 4 March 1912 and an article, "Eight Hour Day", printed on 28 April 1911. Esson's wife wrote much of this period.

We were all rebels and rebels at this time that Esson was partly writing in the old *Australian* edited by W. S. Ross, compiler that Bertrand O'Dwyer sold him with a bookend in his eyes, could bring him five years for rebellion. Although he was not a discredited revolutionary, Esson never accepted the present social order, nor the conventional standards of politeness any more than in literary questions.

As a personal of Esson's article "Our Government", registered in the *Copyright* Page 1973 edition of his play, clearly shows, most of Bertrand's news are also those of the playwright.

On the night of the 1912 performance, however, the audience was not convinced that the playwright held any strong socialist opinions. The *Argus* of 24 July 1912 reported:

"Initially to distribute more and only a partial political attack occurs here of 'Young' Very old is a kindly human way, he teaches well and he needs the folks extrovert, rather than introvert,

is Not Yet Ripe, Jess Wilkins discusses the plays of Louis Esson

of those engaged in the government of the country and those who are not engaged in governing them." *Reverend Charles*, P. 6. It could be argued, indeed, that Esson is not really a socialist but that he was more concerned with improving the quality of life of his countrymen. In his anti-slavery speech, he tells his audience:

I believe in compulsory Greek at schools and universities — open air camps where one could attain, with and meet one's friends, pleasure and health — a few hours, starting day, no daily newspaper, greater silence, more leisure. (Act III, p. 11)

Possibly Esson became more serious about his politics and had second thoughts about the ideological content of *The Fire is Not Yet Ripe*. Philip Parsons in the introduction to the Currency Press edition of the play relates that there exists an unprinted copy of the 1912 edition in which Esson "seems to retreat" to replace the dialogue between Doris and Barratt that leads to the breaking of their engagement, with "ideological argument". Furthermore:

Roughly sketched dialogue of the same kind appears again at the end of the play, just clearly with the intention of giving more ideological substance to the line necessary, but between the lines. Other major changes include a shift of tone away from the flippancy in the original. (p. 18)

These revisions probably belong to the period when Esson had become a serious disciple of materialism and began to try to make his play more realistic. It would, however, have been unfortunate if he had made his play more serious in 1912.

Katherine Bradley calls *The Fire is Not Yet Ripe* "a highly literate comedy", yet Esson's only reference to G. B. Shaw is an complimentary: "As a cynic ... he is a brilliant writer and he has no feeling for life", wrote Esson in the *Satirist* on 11 July, 1913. True so, the character of Doris, Esson's attractive heroine, is not unlike the "new woman" of the plays of Shaw and others — Major Barbara, Captain and Mrs. Agamemnon, Barratt's officers in shock has audience into an awareness of the social system in which they live, here avatars of Shaw's heroes.

If Esson did not acknowledge any admiration for Shaw, he was prepared to at least the fact of another writer. This was the Irish playwright W. B. Yeats whom he first met with J. M. Synge while on a journey to Europe in 1904, and again in London in 1920.

In 1904 and 1905, Esson and his friend and fellow journalist, Lynn Brailey, saw Yeats' plays, *The King's Threshold* and *The Fairy's Threshold* and Synge's plays, *At the Shadow of the Glen*, *The Well of the Seer* and *Deirdre the Fair* at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.¹

Esson came back to Australia to write three short plays which were published in 1911. These were *The Woman Farmer*, a comedy based on his knowledge of share characters in "Little Ley" (Lonsdale Street), Melbourne, *Dead Teacher*, a tragedy of a bush farmer and *A Slave* (Play dealing with Mahomedan Indian bondsmen whose religion interested Esson

greatly). McMillan produced *Dead Teacher* on 13 and 14 December 1911 while William Morris staged *The Woman Farmer* first (dead) night on 5 October 1912 and *The Slave* (also on her fourth Drama Night) on 15 May 1912, two months before the performance of *The Fire is Not Yet Ripe*.

William and T. Ingle Morris dedicated their anthology, *Short Australian Plays*, published in 1917, to Louis Esson:

whose group of comedy plays, produced in Melbourne about 1911, were the first original and distinctive contributions to our drama.

That was at a time when the emerging national character who formed the main audience for drama, looked mainly to productions which had already succeeded overseas, for their entertainment. Australian drama hardly existed.

It was during this period that Esson published two slim volumes of verse, *Gold and Green* in 1910 and *Red Green and Other Verses* in 1911, as well as various articles and short stories in the *Loose Hand*.

A second meeting with Yeats in London in 1920 led to Esson becoming involved in the formation of the Pioneer Players, modeled on the players of the Abbey Theatre. Synge's advice to Esson to "go to the life of the people" is interpreted, unfortunately, as meaning country people. Although Esson was more familiar with city people, as he had shown in *The Woman Farmer* and *The Fire is Not Yet Ripe*, he agreed with Synge that "there is more possibility of a distinctive Australian literature arising in the mysterious country back of Sydney" than in the cities which are cities in other countries. This attitude was influenced by Esson's admiration for Australian writing realistically about the bush, especially Henry Lawson.

Another unfortunate influence was Yeats' suggestion that Esson "might do" his "best things in tragedy"; an opinion, probably formed after he had read Esson's moving short play *The Driveway* written in London in his second visit.

For the Pioneers, Esson wrote *Worker and Son* and *The Slave of Gipsy Place*, serious plays which, however, tried to fill in contradictions, and a comedy of life as a desert goldfield. *The Butler* which is slight and unimpressive. Admittedly for the Pioneer plays were small and critics were uninterested.

Esson's gift for humour and dialogue is rarely present in his Pioneer plays. He seems to regard it as no longer suitable for drama. In the introduction to *The Southern Cross and Other Plays* Hilda Esson wrote of the meetings of literary men in Melbourne:

I wish some of the stories of those days could be told, when *Loose Hand* and *Red Green* and *Gold and Green* and *Red Green and Other Verses* was the delight of his friends and the admiration of his foes. His interpretation of "obstinate scepticism" may well have been to define the "pioneer" and it was a sport he never ceased inventing (p. 19).

In *The Fire is Not Yet Ripe* Esson's audience certainly enjoys his sport of defining the "pioneer" — both Doris'

father and her fiance. Although the same theme, that need for freedom and aesthetic pleasure in life, runs through some of his serious Pioneer plays, notably *Worker and Son* and even *The Slave of Gipsy Place*, Esson fails to carry with the same lightness of touch that he displays in his political comedy. He seemed to forget that "there in his ridiculous aspects lies a long and honourable tradition in drama" and that comedy may be a vehicle for serious ideas.

After the Pioneer Players ceased their activities in 1925, Esson continued to write plays but these were never acted. He health restricted his activities until his death in 1944. Nevertheless, his strong championing of Australian drama made him a legend in his own life time.

It is to Esson and the Pioneer Players that we owe the tradition that Australians could write plays about their own people and that companies would be formed to produce such plays.

To them, moreover, we can probably attribute the young belief in socialism (which they equated with realism) which for so long pervaded Australian plays, as well as their traditional simplicity. It was not until the production of Patrick White's *Atom Funeral* (1962) and Michael Boddy and Bob Ellis' *The Legend of King O'Malley* (1967) that these traditions began to be broken.

The involvement in the bush ethos which so many Pioneer plays displayed has continued as a strong element of our drama. Such plays as Ray Lawler's *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (1957) and Jack Hibberd's *A Search of the Imagination* (1971) show this.

Esson's view of the Australian vernacular as "a 'dope' play, moreover, not a style which can still be found in so many plays today, from *The One Day of the Year* (1957) to *The Aborigines* (1971).

While it is to be regretted that Esson abandoned the writing of serious, witty comedy about the land of life with which he was directly involved, after the performance of *The Fire is Not Yet Ripe*, yet, perhaps, his concern for the quality of Australian life continues in many contemporary playwrights. The one that comes to mind is the author of that other "classic" play, *Don's Party* (1971) in which Williamson's more savage satire conveys a somewhat similar regret to that of Esson's character, Barratt, that people do not share "freedom, joy and splendour".

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4. Letter from London from L. Esson to V. Palmer, dated 21 December 1910, V. Palmer, *Asian Drama and the Australian Theatre*, p.13.
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6. Act IV, p.10.

Part Two

The Armidale Experience



Ray Omodei & Diana Sharpe

The Armidale Project 1971, outlined in *Theatre Australia* October 1971, is over. After eight weeks rehearsal and tour and a sell-out matinee in the North-West, the company sailed out on 14 July, returning to Sydney to show the *Alpha* which had been developed up there, to any audience at the NIDA. Theatre it played to seven packed houses and could have continued for three or four weeks more, had the theatre and actors been available. Returns to the project have been more than encouraging and on 10 September Raymond Coombs and John Newley returned to the district for six weeks of intensive follow-up programmes for teachers in Boggabri, Cooma, Kiaming, Narrabri and Boggabri. Plans are already under way for an expanded programme in 1972.

Last November there were over 100 applicants for auditions. For our purposes, acting talent was not the only consideration. References were exhaustive and involved predictions of personality functioning in a touring/long tour situation for six months. We were also looking for actors who were articulate in the theatre-education area of our work and who would be able to communicate with tertiary as well as secondary and primary students and staff. The company finally selected Ray Anderson, Jim Carlin, Barbara Dennis, Malcolm Keith, Dallas Lewis and Chris Urquhart. John Wragg selected productions for infants and primary schools — Raymond Douglas, the Project

Director, was responsible for the rest. John Newley was appointed Company Manager. His administrative capacity for the technical, public relations and company spirit aspects of the project was largely responsible for its smooth flowing, effectiveness and impact.

Malcolm Keith and Barbara Dennis, the senior members of the acting company, gave generously of their talents and expertise in company classes (voice, movement, drama, scene and general coaching). Their professional and personal contributions were extensive and vital. Accomplished performers themselves, they took great interest in the less experienced members of the company and were both examples and teachers to them.

The programme was to begin with a play for the general adult public, prepare to schools presentations and develop a play or two for the adult audience of college and university. The selection of *Midterm of Trust* to Alpha was felicitous — and during other weeks of reading and agreeing over a selection of suggested scripts.

Malcolm at first would not release the play to us, claiming that it was impossible to perform with only six adults. We managed to persuade him that we could do it, with lighting, quick changes and a minor transposition of one of the scenes. He then happily gave permission. Barbara developed each exception to some of the language in the text — but generally, auditions satisfied it.

The tour had a triumphant opening in Taree, in an accessible school hall, to a capacity audience and progressed for a month through the North coastal and Northwest towns, finishing off with three performances in Armidale. A matinee in Taree directed the audience aged over eight in the dressing rooms, with the result that the citizens of Kempsey (the next town) were given the additional delight of seeing the entire wardrobe designed in the sun for hours, on ladders, frames and up-modifying ladders.

From Taree's splendid set and the costumes from the Old Tote production two groups of delight, especially in the towns where "big" shows don't usually play and where people rarely see professionally designed products at such audiences. Their opinion was that the word of mouth on Alpha was so enthusiastic that if we had back-tracked on the tour, we would have had packed houses.

Much loved by the country audience, Alpha had a mixed reception on its first night in Armidale. The performances were

below par, the result of exhaustion from a strenuous tour and the fact that the leading players had been rehearsing both *The Advisor* and preparing *The Home Show* to within a couple of hours of opening. Unknown to us, the theater is equipped with air conditioning which is both erratic and has a fearful effect on the audience for the spoken word.

The company relaxed fully in the theater after the opening night, adjusted to the peculiar acoustics and refined the performance which had been somewhat dimmed after playing in a series of venues ranging from remote houses to the young centres of civic centres. Subsequent performances were received with tremendous enthusiasm by large audiences.

For schools, *Midterm of Trust* by Michael Gow, were efficient products of commitment. The readings and rehearsals supported each other and with minor changes in rehearsal they proved extremely successful with students and teachers.

We were interested about *The Advisor* by John Mullaney, from the outset — however, the size and nature of the writing had potential. The men who workshop and develop the text. The final product, however, proved unsatisfactory for the intermediate students. A preview in Sydney attended by officers of both companies brought pride for the acting and decided, but alarm was expressed at the play itself.

The company returned for eight weeks, from 29 December, initially at Boggabri and then at the Old Tote's rehearsal studio before departing for Armidale on 18 February. We decided to look at *The Advisor* again after the Alpha tour was launched, to see what could be done with the text. We spent several days "workshopping" it at the end of the first week of the tour and kept arriving at its-

It was finally decided to keep it reharsed in its initial state and to develop a more show derived by Malcolm Keith with the same cast. Both shows were presented in Armidale in an invited audience of teachers and inspectors who were unanimous in their praise for the work in both offerings and strongly in favour of the revised show as the proper choice for presentation to intermediate students. *The Advisor* was considered excellent fare in, say, under-graduate areas, but at this age and context it was not accessible to children in the intermediate age group.

Teachers and inspectors were impressed by the fact that we were concerned enough

to produce a product we regarded as unsatisfactory despite weeks of work and expense. This was also frequently experienced by the company's ability to provide an effective alternative. Both companies worked together in new vehicles and were programmed, in most cases, into the same school. The concept of running two simultaneous performances in schools is clearly a positive and much appreciated by teachers as it causes minimum disruption to the working day. However, it is only in primary schools that this can be done (they often have several double classrooms) as we usually need the hall/gymnasium of high schools and had to play the after the school.

We have been most fortunate this year that the Intermediate play, being a more show, was readily adaptable for the middle age range it was to cover. In that it is unlikely we shall be able to find as flexible a play again in 1978, both companies should have two plays in their repertoire, ie. one play for schools altogether, Junior Primary, Senior Primary, Junior Secondary, Senior Secondary.

The May season of Oldies recuperated the public and in particular the staff of the English department — many of whom were more than two. Their letters of thanks for the company's work delighted us.

Ray Ondrej worked on the text and found that it could be performed, almost entirely, with seven actors, two doubling (Malcolm/Lester), (Anna/Betty) and one multi-role playing Rodriguez/Dolce/Clown/Lester. Design of set and costumes was simple and stark. The audience response was overwhelming. We played two extra performances and turned away nearly 100 people at one of these. One extra performance sold out at an overtwelve hour because of an excellent P.R. campaign.

Our relationship with the University of New England was central, productive and rewarding, and the co-operation from the Arts Theatre staff — Bob Herbert and Vic Ashfield — beyond praise. We were enormously assisted also by various services

departments and of course, by the enthusiasm of Department Heads and the Vice-Chancellor. Apart from the performances of Oldies and Melba the company provided the University with many other activities such as seminars, radio broadcasts, even sessions from Malcolm Keith (an accomplished tracer) with the Painting Club.

For the College of Advanced Education we offered programmes of the three schools' play, *Charlton* (R.O.) in association with four plays being produced there and an extensive series of workshops conducted by Ray Ondrej, with voice and movement classes conducted by Barbara Dennis. We would have liked to have involved the company more with the CAE but it was impossible financially to marry the College's timetable with our touring schedule.

The Company

Ray Ondrej — Project Director
John Newby — Company Manager
Intermediate Schools Company
Ray Anderson
Malcolm Keith
Barbara Dennis
Junior/ Senior Schools Company
John Cullen
Doris Lewis
Chris Ondrej
All cast in Oldies and Melba

Timetable

29 Dec '76 to 18 Feb '77: Ruhemann
 22 Feb to 21 March: Melba tour
 23 March to 16 July: Schmidt tour
 including
 23 March to 4 June: Ruhemann & Oldies

Number of Performances

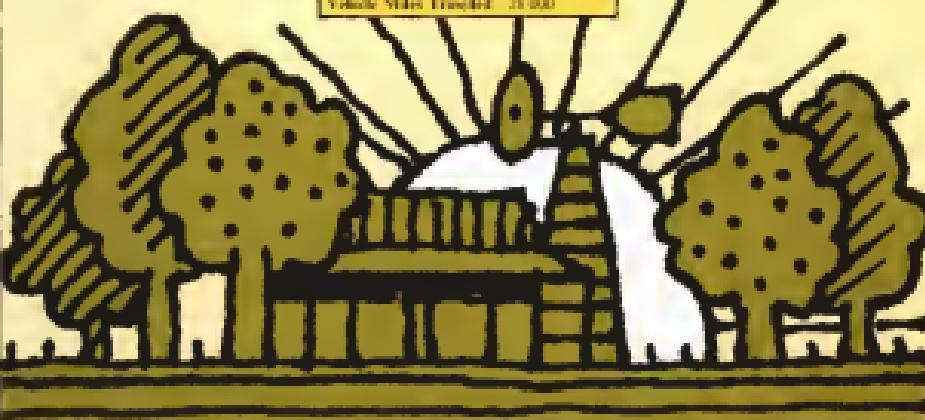
At Towns & Halls	22
Border (Senior play)	83
More Stirs (Intermediate play)	32
1 Suspense (Senior play)	34
Auditions: 24,662	
Workshops:	
11 schools	
1 for local amateur theatre group	
Vehicle Miles Traveled: 28,000	

It was impossible to acknowledge all the requests from amateur groups for workshops and assistance. The directory was too large to allow this. Ray Ondrej, John Newby and a visiting actress from Sydney, Barbara Martin, were a student in the University of NSW's School of Drama gave a day assisting the Glass Menagerie group with no production of *The Old Crook* and the company held informal seminars on several occasions after Melba performances.

We are proud of the company's work done for the *Annulus Project* under the banners of the Old Tote and ATYP and grateful for the constant support of all those concerned to see it succeed. In fact, and in the light of our experience, we will make even more productive use of the enormous energy and often expanded skills of the operators of the touring.

The Project has been extremely successful. As a professional theatre company based in the area it has, to five schools, made itself felt and known and needed. The collective and individual contributions made by the company were enormous. People were quick to voice their praise for the range and quality of the work and the pleasant willingness of the company to accommodate the expressed needs in the area where humanly possible. Expressions of hope that the company would return and stay in the area were universal.

We hope to see the programme repeated, expanded and entrenched. The work was relentless but productive and profoundly rewarding on every possible level. This concept is an effective alternative to and an improvement on the old "spinning from Sydney" model. Those outside the metropolitan are entitled to their share of the entertainment/tour tax dollar and the type of theatre, theatre-education programme and service the Project provided for the people in the area was a positive, visible and identifiably rural one.



The Role of

Unloved, unwanted, misunderstood, underpaid — oh yes, it's a sad profession; see us weep into our free gin and tonics any night in any foyer. You wonder why we bother.

Since the *Dead-Eyed Dick* after, the recent Playwrights' Conference, during which Australian theatre critics came in for some solid hammering, and following Helen Darroch's remarks published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that critics these days perform largely a social function ("only just letting people know what's on"), not forgetting *Theatre Australia's* own effort in underhastening a drama, I have been wondering just why we do bother.

Assuming that a critic surrenders right after night to the magic of the stage, the stories, the writing, the craft of it all, out of love and fascination, why after one's opinion for publication? Is it a case of ego in excess?

Probably the answer is that a critic is as much in love with an actor, with the same need to exalt and exclaim as a playwright — and be passed for doing it. The critic's stage is the journal, the audience the reader, with much the same responsibilities of an actor or writer — to express and enlighten with enjoyment.

While Charles Marowitz won't go down as one of the major critics of the age, he had some interesting points to make about criticism:

He said in his book, *Confessions of a Connoisseur* (Civico), he believed with Oscar Wilde that "the creation of a fine piece of criticism stands shoulder to shoulder with the creation of a fine piece of art, and today, when the theatre is so assailed by fraud, parading as novelty or routine, dispersed as 'technical jargon', the critics' responsibility is even greater than the artist's."

I wouldn't go so far as saying the responsibility is "even greater" than the artist, but it certainly is important in the light of fraud and novelty.

Macowitz further says: "remove the critic and you remove the artist's recognition of what he has accomplished. You remove the frame of reference by which the artist can measure his output. The critic should not be thought of as a solemn adjunct of the theatre, but as an equal and direct reader."

Thus, you may say, as all very well if you

respect the artist involved, and plainly only very few Australian critics are represented by the profession currently.

We are not writing for the theoretical professor however, but for the readers of our various journals. Members of the profession fall into this category, but they are in the minority (along, "bad park figures to give you off, as is estimated that Sydney and Melbourne each have 700,000 people who regularly read arts notation).

Criticism of critics usually goes on the basis of "who do they think they are — God", and "what are their qualifications". Lately the questioning has been more specific (in a suggestion of the critics in general with the profession suggesting that the grass is greener elsewhere and that Australia is particularly ill-gifted). Why don't we have a Sydney Edwards, a Hobson, a Tyrone or a Giese?

Critics might also ask why Australia doesn't have a Peter Brook, or an Oliver or Berthold. The problem should be glad we don't have a Beause, a Lewis, or a Tyrone. They are snobs and dunces for breakfast — especially self-exempted columnists.

It's a cliché, but you might say that like politicians, a country gets the theater it deserves, and the critics it deserves. Similarly, since an actress life, given art usually springs from certain circumstances in the emotional and political climate of a country. A case example of this recently was the rise of Australian writing during the so-called Whitlam years. No really great writing emerged and no great critic sprang to meet it, but more Australian work was being performed, critics gradually became more analytical to look at it.

This was also bound to happen as the role of newspapers had changed. From chasing fire engines over the catwalks, in their own style, raised to background and analysis.

An odd, later addition however is that theatre criticism has become almost exclusively the preserve of the daily press

since the mid-70s, such as the *Belvoir National Review* and *Nation Review*, have closed back.

The closures, made more or less employed critics to any extent, ABC radio does a little, the various television comes to it, Bill Collins' *Home* commentary, and Stuart Wagstaff's introduction to *World Playhouse*.

Most newspapers get the critics they deserve. While Australian critics are not bound by policy in any way, most are aware of the audience they write for, and can thus write satisfactorily. An exception to illustrate the point is *Hans Frost*, the *Sunday Telegraph's* new critic, who is said to be too "intellectual" for his readers.

There are many occupational hazards — time, space, and un sympathetic editors. Two hundred words, which is some critics' limit, pit about twice more of the same of the show, where it's at, who's in it. Requests for more mean usually fall on deaf ears — what's a play to a full page *Weekend* ad, or an important political or sporting story. But everybody has occupational and personal hazards. A critic may not be able to run above critics of certain playwrights, may neglect the case for questioning the writing (as I did in my recent review). A reviewer may be harassed, a director depresses everybody he blind spots.

So do Australian critics have more than others? Are they "the voice in the world" (Paul Elliot, entrepreneur), "dilettante" (Ross McGregor who apparently willingly had accepted a national critics award), "behind the times" (actor Robin Ramsay), "indecisive" and "more or less vacant" (Helen van der Heijden), "poor and arrogant" (Berthold Herwitz), "subversive and unformed" (Richard Wherrey).

Of course not. The sort of criticism is typical of creative and disappointing of people whose feelings have been hurt. Nobody likes to be criticised, least of all people who are putting more than just learned skills into their profession, but body and soul as well.

You hear that sort of thing in every country from somebody who seeks praise and finds he or she has no pop clapping him as well.

The point is however, that Australian critics are different from those elsewhere in the world — because they tell stories just as they are, without writing up a storm, without dubious, intellectual talk. The sort of criticism the Australian profession seems to want is the florid, affectation of plays and plays in which all sorts of motives are "discovered" where motives did not exist. All that sort of writing achieves is a self-protective zone.

Australians are writing for people who want to know what the play is like before paying out the large sum now being exacted for tickets, and those who can't go but enjoy a marginal opinion. That is their kind. Australian newspapers just aren't

"Has anybody ever seen a dramatic critic in the daytime? Of course not. They come out after dark, up to no good." P.G. Wodehouse

interested in anything "because".

But there are many shades of syntax and criticism, from light to the more serious, and readers become used to the bluntness and subtlety of their paper's review.

For instance in the Sydney Open House one night, I heard a woman tell her companion "well, Kevin Kang didn't like that, so we should".

There are critics who specialize in script analysis, others who write merely layer-pump, those who understand direction better than they do a director, but few who write well about acting.

Since the decline of the actor's theatre (other people would say any rebirth of *Wolfs* was playing) and the rise of the playwright's importance, critics writing about acting for general readership is uncommon. In a recently published *Life Theatre* *Playbills* a singer may explain acting on a technical level, but for study or weekly consumers you find critics falling back on tired expressions like "immaturity", "credibility", "in the element", "well-rounded performances" (which are all that).

Some comfort may be gained from Shaw (I think) who wrote that describing the actor's art was the most difficult art of all.

The most frequent complaint about critics is that they think they are "Gods" because a critics might appear not to a report of a disaster or political coup, it tends to take on the status of final word of opinion.

A review after all is only one person's opinion, based on a context-you-are-not (and, happy, tired, ill) sitting on one performance — the same as any paying customer.

A critic is a professional shyster-guru, whose objectives include attending only nights at difficult performances than any actor or director, considerable reading around the subject, and often, planned opposition with a company.

At least from the profession is essential — there is nothing harder than reviewing a friend's work.

There may be a thought, stemming from Marxist, to bring the profession and critics closer together. One or two people thought that critics should sit in on rehearsals to see how directors and actors worked together, developed a show. Others were nervous of the idea.

It was an interesting thought, but meant could be an journalistic than critics. One becomes ill with the finished product, one should be aware of the means which went into the ends, but not to be too sympathetic to it.

A critic's job is not to destroy the illusion but to reinforce it. Where one feels the illusion is there, the task is to explain why.

That's fine in theory. I don't always work out that way. Writing a fair review is as rare as writing a brilliant performance — whether you're in Australia, London, New York, Paris or just Pimperton, USA.

Robert Page
in editor of
Theatre Australia

To attempt to put forward a series of formulae by which theatre is to be appraised is to frustrate and disengaged us to try to establish a series of rules by which art must be judged. Essentially criticism is the art of writing about art, as the American critic G.J. Nathan put it: "Art is a partnership between the artist and the art-critic. The former creates, the latter re-creates".

If criticism is the art of writing about art then its materials are words and an aesthetic appeal the way in which those words are put together. The importance of style then is paramount. "Style is not an available quality of writing, it is the writing itself".

The best reviews are light, flowing and complete, reflecting the content of an attained mind rather than maddeningly bantering woolly thoughts. "Unhappily most of our critics are born ugly", lamented Shaw. Bold common, is dressed as the right type of words. Repeat that, however common is the translation into language of a whole range of impressions which comprise the theatrical experience, the best critique reflect something of the flavour and atmosphere of the performance in their work.

"Criticism is designed to state facts — shamingly, gracefully if possible — but tell facts. It is not designed to extort, extol or convert" (Nathan). Yet many critics see themselves only as keepers of their own opinions in their role as publicists for the theatre industry. To reduce criticism to only the view of an individual is to limit its importance entirely. From the general viewpoint such a viewpoint is really as useless, as a way of viewing (so far as human beings can be accused of) "objection" judgements.

Theatre can be assessed in terms of what the playwright hopes to achieve and what the production realises (or even betters), programmes can be poor, actors unreliable, lighting unperformed, criticism of the writer period and so on. Opinion is the easy part of being a critic, the hard part is to understand opinion in broad analysis.

Another view (from the same group) is that of the "know-nothing" school of critics. The argument is that nothing should be taught put about a production, not the script, read before a performance in order to be as closely just another member of the audience as possible.

Yet this can only be true for a producer, inevitably a critic must leave more of theatre, his/her art dead to us, and as such he can never claim that not preparing himself for anything other than an excuse for genuine lack of use or leisure. If in general the critic cannot help being more informed than the audience then he should develop his knowledge and discernment, he may then be in a position

the Critic

to point out the worth of a production beyond that of the way it is received by the public. Otherwise why should he waste his pen?

Why not say other member of the audience? Or better why not tell those who have seen the play? As Shaw said rather blithely of the critic in relation to his audience: "it is his business to educate these idiots not to value them". Respect for a critic is respect for his knowledge and developed powers of discernment, not for his self-optimisation or snobbery.

Knowledge and experience allow the critic to recognise that which is the combination of the writer, that of director, actors, designer and so on, the differences between or combination of intention and realisation, and even something of previous productions other work of the same and director, and the rest of the playwright's career.

Too many reviews rely too heavily on a dogged tenacity of the way where clearly this is only one (and usually a minor) element. The theatre is a collaborative art form, it appears able to appraise the work of a number of artists — actors, playwrights, directors and designers and sometimes choreographers and musicians.

It should be approached as a series of various talents, the difficulty is to find the signature which leads one from the complex organism which constitutes a piece of theatre to the assessment of it in worth. The way may be via a central theme, a metaphor or a major piece of banter — though with a sense of the creative work as a whole being preserved.

The only criticism of not enough space but, within obvious limits, restriction of the number of words can be seen as a virtue, not a failing allowing only superficial comment. But (John Haughey) can that "concentrate the mind wonderfully". The allowing of pedantry has its own dangers.

What criticism needs is depth of perception, richness of response and close attention to the performance on the part of its practitioners. The work should have sufficient descriptive value to allow audience to choose whether a play is for them, not for told whether or not to see it because of the opinion of one largely untrained individual. The most appropriate level of discourse should be adopted in conveying assessment of a production, with no attempt to garnish or gender to a supposed readership.

As a writer the critic is duty bound to produce a piece of criticism as he can imagine, as a drama writer he should turn the load of excitement about the play which covers itself through his work. Charles Marowitz commented, "the best critics... in criticism which because of its soundness and substance immediately has the effect of promotional copy".

The Edgeleys: a theatre family

When commercial theatre is mentioned, one immediately thinks of J.C. Williamson, Sam Brodsky, Harry M. Miller (who he raised from the stage?) — and the Edgeleys.

Although the Williamson name has been the front for various theatrical companies for a number of years, the original Mr. Williamson died in 1913. Brodsky has been a power on the commercial theatre scene since the famous 'Mister' only a familiar name in the field in the 1920s, whilst the seventeen long introduced Eric Duse. The Edgeley name, though, has been known to audiences for more than 50 years, with ever-increasing importance.

The company, known for many years as Edgeley and Duse, and today as Michael Edgeley International, started in an English music hall — Eric Edgeley and Clem Duse — making an debut in Australia in a Melbourne pantomime, *Richard the Sailor* for J.C. Williamson in 1919. The two were actually brothers, born in Birmingham, whose real surname was White. Their mother, as Elizabeth Williamson, had as a child been in the ladies of Covent Garden, and was principal dancer in a pantomime when she met her future husband, who was a member of the orchestra. He was Richard White, a professional instrumentalist who also happened to be a talented cellist and amateur player in theatre orchestras.

As her husband's wife, Mrs. White (as

Elizabeth was affectionately called) retired from the stage upon marriage, but later was able to offer practical advice to her children. In addition to Eric and Clem, there were also Leslie, Dick and Dorothy who took to the stage, but who renounced the name of White. The last in fact joined a well-known troupe, The Lancashire Lads, who could boast of having provided among greatest for Charlie Chaplin and Stan Laurel.

During the First World War Eric and Clem gained experience with English tour and pantomime companies. While appearing as brother's men in Canterbury, they were invited by a R.C.W. agent and encouraged to appear in Australia. The brothers were popular with audiences, they loved the country and decided to stay.

Before leaving England, Clem and Eric had worked in a coastal tour company known as *The Rockies*, and they decided to form a similar company in Australia, calling it *The Midnights*. It was founded in Perth in 1922, and Dick, Leslie and Dorothy White also joined them. In the cast as well, were the wives of Eric and Leslie, dancer Phyllis Avery, and Nell McLean.

Apparently the brothers had hit upon a magic formula and *The Midnights* Faded in various cities, toured Australia for more than 15 years.

In early 1930 Phyllis Edgeley died when

her son, Philip, was born. Edna Lumsden, a young dancer with the company, took charge of the baby.

With *The Midnights* Faded so successful in this country, the brothers decided to take an all-Australian series company to England, the first time such a thing had occurred. Unfortunately, on London opening coincided with the death of George V, it was not well received, and turned out to be a financial failure. Despite this, the brothers remained in London, and in 1939 participated in the first television broadcast from the stage of the London Coliseum.

Ten years after the death of his wife, Eric re-married. This time it was to Edna Lumsden. At the time of their marriage they were appearing together in variety at the Empire Theatre, Holloway.

By now the Second World War had started, and the brothers decided it was time for them to return to Australia. After a year of performing, they were seen at Sydney's Theatre Royal in *Fancy Dress Up* in 1940, followed by *Phantom Up* in 1942. Eric's second son, Michael, was born, and a few years later, Christine.

The last known use the brothers reviving *The Midnights* type of show, usually at Hobart. Again the financial proved disastrous and once more they toured Australia with it.



Eric Edgeley and Clem Duse 1914

'Make no mistake about it. The Edgleys do not just book a show and wait for the returns to flow in. For them it is sheer hard work'

They were back in Paris, at His Majesty's Theatre, by the early 1960s, and decided to take a lease on the theatre. Young Philip was now appearing on stage alongside his father and uncle.

From 1960 to 1966 Edgleys & Bates Attractions operated in Paris at His Majesty's, presenting locally produced shows, as well as attractions from the eastern stages. Then in 1965 Clem died suddenly and for Mack as he was usually called by friends Edgleys carried on, aided by Edna and Philip.

But Eric observed that the trend now was for entrepreneurs in the eastern states to import companies from overseas, which were usually successful. With the thought in his head that he, too, could import attractions, Eric made an overseas trip in 1968. It was when in Russia he hit upon idea — strangely not thought of by other management — which ultimately would advance the fortunes of the family firm. He would import Russian companies.

The first company, in 1969, established as the Moscow State Variety Theatre Company and featuring artists from the Bolshoi Ballet and Opera, puppets, acrobats, jugglers, magicians, magicians, folk dances and specialty acts from the Moscow State Circus. Aware of the risks involved, Edgleys was uncertain when CW's and Amco Services agreed to share some of Michael's entrepreneurial risks. The same year he brought out a second company, this time consisting of 24 star performers from the Bolshoi Ballet. Both attractions were big box-office hits.

Over the next few years the Edgleys family introduced to Australia — who never seemed to tire of them — Russian companies who were to return again and again, their success always reflected in the healthy box-office returns. Then there was the Georgian State Dance Company, the Odessa Sazanov Company, the Belorussian Dance Company of Moscow, the Oregon Ballets Orchestra, the Moscow Philharmonic Song and Dance Company, the Moscow Dance Ensemble of the USSR and perhaps the biggest of them all, the Cuban Moscow Circus.

In February 1971, after a short illness, Eric Edgleys died. Now more than ever, Edgleys and Doug was a family concern. Philip, Edna and Michael were following directions, but it was young Michael who apparently was at the head. Philip, though, as artistic director, was off to Moscow to negotiate new attractions, and met the Press. One recalls him earnestly talking about performances he had seen of the Moscow Arts Theatre Company, regretful that it would be impossible to bring it to Australia.

Philip had been stage-struck and while at school was well known on radio in a

feature show a wartime crooner, David Minto Australia. He performed with his brother Peter Edgleys and Ron Randall and toured for JCW's in 1958-9 in the revue *For Entertainment Only*. In the early days of the imported Russian shows Philip would act as interpreter and arranger acts from the stage. Philip is no longer with the Edgleys organisation because of ill-health he has to bow out never or eight years ago.

By 1971 J.C. Williamson Theatres — which had led the live theatre field for so many years — were showing signs of decline, and obviously some sort of blood transfusing was required. In September that year a merger took place between JCW and the Edgleys, the new company being called Williamson-Edgleys Theatres Ltd., and headed by the dynamic Michael, then only 27. JCW had a 60 per cent share in the new company, the Edgleys 40 per cent. One member of the board was Bruce Gyppert, then with the Channel 7 TV Network.

At the same Michael Edgleys made sweeping changes at JCW's. He cut away a lot of the dead wood and (at some point) quite ruthlessly recruited a number of JCW employees who had been with 'The Firm' a great many years. Naturally such moves were not popular. But Michael was unhappy working at the Melbourne JCW office. For the amount of work he was putting into it all he felt he was not getting enough out. For him it was all too bureaucratic, involving enormous responsibility, and basically he had no real interest in mounting musicals and plays, but wanted to return to presenting spectaculars. After 10 months, therefore, the partnership was dissolved. It was all very amicable. The time spent with JCW's was probably good experience for Michael and certainly for JCW's, since they chalked up their highest profit for a decade.

So now it was back to his own company. By this time Michael was surrounded by the hard-working team which had worked with him over seven, almost ten, years. Michael's wife and sister Christine of course, Christine's career as a dancer was cut short when, during the tour of *Oliver!* on *Forrest* while in Adelaide, he made his first on-stage appearance as which she was performing dressed in the stage and she was injured. Then there is Michael's wife, Ron, in charge of the company's national publicity, and most certainly one of the best publicists in the country.

Over the past 10 years Michael's right hand man has been artistic director Andrew Gould (Remember Andrew's performances as the Artful Dodger in *Oliver!* and the young Prince in *The King and I*, one realises the stage has probably had a very useful artist). Andrew can speak fluent Russian, will shortly be making his fifth

visit to the USSR, and is married to a former Russian ballerina Al-Cel Gavars. There is also David Petersen, manager of the company's financial affairs, who selects attractions from the People's Republic of China. Another is an JCW man Wayne Shurman, who opened the tour parks' concert division, makes regular visits to the U.S., and has his eye fixed on current pop-music trends.

Another generation of Edgleys is on the way. Mark, Michael's 13-year-old son by his first marriage, and his two daughters, Sasha and Cate. Already Mark appears to be taking an interest in stage

make no mistake about it. The Edgleys do not just book a show and wait for the returns to flow in. For them it is sheer hard work. Members of the family, as well as Andrew and Wayne, will accompany tours throughout Australia, frequently working around the clock, never taking days off. One recalls the Melbourne opening of the *Guinness Circus* in March earlier this year, when all members of the organisation seemed to be actively engaged in chores. During the performances, and one Michael himself running around, giving rapid instructions, and even personally helping to tighten ropes.

When in 1973 Michael was made a MBE for his contribution to the performing arts in Australia (the youngest Australian ever to receive an honour for theatre), he had really earned it. In 1975 he was named "Citizen of the Year" in Western Australia.

Today Michael is mounting more and more shows in association with Ron Broderick, managing director of J.C. Williamson Productions (of which Michael is also a director). The much hit *A Choice Love* is a joint production, so too are the plays *Young Perdita* and *Boeing-Boeing*. The Edgleys organisation is also presenting attractions in collaboration with other management. Last year the company hit box office, grossing around \$6 million at the box office, this year the figure is expected to be something like \$90 million.

Talk to Michael today and one realises he is a tough business man, firmly in the game for the money. Certainly he admits being interested only in presenting high-mane entertainment talent, with no time for the unknown or experimental.

Stylistically, on the face of it, the Edgleys organisation does not seem very interested in presenting Australian originated shows (although they are in presenting, with JCW's, *The Diviners* and *My Fair Lady*). However, in 1973 Michael did originate an annual prize of \$25,000 for the performing arts in Western Australia, likely to become a national operation in year.

The Two Macbeths

David Gyger



Luciano Giuseppe Verdi's last two operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, which are also based on Shakespeare plays, his *Macbeth* — which is right up the Sydney Opera House's alley — is decidedly not a masterpiece. But, for that very reason, perhaps, it is a fascinating object lesson in the complex artifice of transforming great drama to the operatic stage.

The drama is fine — and there are many, both musical and dramatic — Verdi's *Macbeth* is a major milestone in the history of opera, and in its latest production a marvellous re-creation of Shakespeare in a new medium. The sleep-walking scene, Act II Scene 2 of the opera, is an almost exact translation into Italian of Act V Scene 1 of the play, the banquet scene of the opera is very close to the banquet scene of the play down to the appearance of the rascals and the two apparitions of Banquo's ghost.

For Act I Scene 2 of the opera is a clever amalgamation of the first three scenes of the play (there is no scene in Shakespeare's Act I scene 3 and Act II Scene 1), incorporating all the important scenes between Lady Macbeth's attempt of Macbeth's sleep describing her first encounter with the witches and the discovery of Duncan's murder in one continuous chain of singing action. No sooner has Lady Macbeth read the letter, and mailed it over in an envelope, than Macbeth arrives and almost on the heels the King, who crosses the stage without uttering a word (in the opera he is a non-singing party). Everyone follows him off stage but when immediately Macbeth returns to sing his noted soliloquy, "Mam' alleste un pagai? Falso a me vole?" ("Is this a dagger? / No, sonnet has be caused an old famous rhyming couplet, "Non s'indra, Duncan! E squilla carna! che nel cielo si chiede a' vel velere" (Hear it not, Duncan!), then Lady Macbeth comes in to make a few lines and prepare to receive him back to report, "Tutto è finito!" ("I have done the deed!").

This follows a introduces duet between the Macbeths, a cleverly un-Shakespearean amalgamation of several bits and pieces from the play, chopped and changed about so as to satisfy the operatic need for vocal confrontation — not to mention the opera composer's yearning to have an opportunity to display his skill in creating complex concerted ensemble passages, where vocal lines can interweave in a fascinating web of oppositions and confusions and fugal solo passages. Before the curtain falls on this extraordinary scene, the murder has been discovered but without the time-taking disposure of the drunken porter's agony and exegesis in sight has escaped in a long-winded and repetitious series of stock accusations and petitions to the Almighty to bring the perpetrator of the crime due to justice.

Shakespearean passes by now, no doubt, will be running out their hair at the description of such megalomania to great drama, the Bard himself, totally unfamiliar as he certainly was with the conventions of

19th-century opera, is no doubt running over in his grave. It may be some consolation to him to know that Verdi, who, far from being an ignorant entrepreneurial tycoon, was an experienced Shakespearean student, was very concerned indeed to do justice to the original drama when he first tackled *Macbeth* at the age of 24, giving most of the libretto himself a polish and then handing it on to others for some finessing. Yet, first, for *Macbeth* is one of those problematical operas which exist in two versions separated by a time gap of 12 years — the first the product of Verdi's young mind, the second of his full maturity. The revision was prompted by plans to stage the work in Paris in 1865, where a ban on all repeat performances forced Verdi to start out with, Verdi loyal to the version and subtitled *Act I*; *Act III*, the original's staged version, some which is an extended version of Shakespeare's *Act IV* Scene 1 with the addition of a new, un-Shakespearean quizzical-mischievous aside between the Macbeths, Lady Macbeth having inexplicably tracked down her husband in the witches' cavern as her presumable impatience is filed out what the bugs, bugs been producing now. At the same time, he also deleted a dying aria for Macbeth in the last scene.

Yet of course one can dwell too much on such flaws in an opera which after all is one chosen to be a masterpiece, and secondly the quality of your average non-British 19th-century operatic metadrama, even its imperfections (there is at least fair average quality and maybe a little better than that) and the problems of condescension involved in getting any update play down to the dimensions of an opera libretto and movements. Admittedly, Macbeth is a short play by Shakespeare's standards, but this only means that, say, one-third not two-thirds, rather than four-fifths of the original.

In fact, Verdi's opera gives a good deal of dramatic unity by eliminating a number of scenes and telescoping others in the manner detailed above with respect to the original and revised *Julius Caesar*, the first act and 28 scenes of the original play are compressed to an economic four acts and 10 scenes in the opera.

There is a good deal of discussion in a comparative study of the two *Macbeths* but, having detailed the main points of divergence of Verdi and Shakespeare in purely dramatic, textual terms, it is necessary to focus in to point out that this is merely a specific, though quite useful, exercise illustrating the difference between spoken drama and opera. Few if any spoken librettos can stand on their own two feet in spoken play texts, upon which any good is a partnership of text and stage, each of which complements — indeed, is vital to — thorough understanding of — the other.

One would think it impossible for drama to deal satisfactorily with complex subplots of characterisation simply because it cannot get enough words across to all

audience effectively enough, but sometimes opera does indeed succeed — even with startling effectiveness — in doing just that. The reason for this is the concentrated power of the music itself, not to mention its unique ability to impinge on to the sort of semi-willing suspension of disbelief that makes, as I say, in *Act I* Scene 2 of Verdi's *Macbeth*, that 12 hours or more simply start here staged during the course of a single scene of continuous stage action which takes little more than half an hour to perform. And music can also, of course, condense or reinforce a singer's words almost subliminally, establish a few bars of foreboding introduction or interpreting mood that might require pages of spoken dialogue.

Verdi's *Macbeth* stimulates us to think on such scenes because of all its many pretences, the fact that it is such an astonishing mixture of marvellous operatic and musical and dramatic inventiveness verging on the absurd. Having shown Shakespeare's plot in its very bones — by and large a study of the relations of the two Macbeths through an all-consuming obsession to richness and defined absolute power — it then proceeds to embellish and externalise Lady Macbeth's character in three vocal scenes while internalising and pruning Macbeth's character down to a bare minimum. His great catalogue, "Mi è afflito un pepero" ("It is then a dagger"), never gets off the ground in a piece of vocal display, but one might argue it is the next-best scene of the opera, just before the death of Lady Macbeth. Yet he spends an enormous amount of time on stage, and there is a brooding power in his music which gives him the opportunity to be every inch the wolf's equal in dramatic terms. It is just as tough and demanding a role as Lady Macbeth, if in quite a different way.

But finally and all, Verdi's *Macbeth* is a masterpiece of operatic literature for the way it emphasises at places on dramatic aspects of the art form as opposed to vocal display. In *Macbeth*, Verdi did not succeed nearly so well as he was to succeed much later in *Caesar*, but there is a good deal of evidence, some from his own lips, that he had a clear vision of what he was after. Furthermore, as a celebrated young composer (only 24 years old) he was pretty clearly feeling his oats as the production role, issuing very precise instructions. For instance, as to how the appearance of the king should appear in the last witches' scene and making pronouncements, even outbursts, statements about casting. Objecting to the choice of one Madama Taddea, who had been suggested for the role of Lady Macbeth, he wrote to the director of the relevant production: "This may sound absurd, but Madama Taddea is a handsome woman with a beautiful face, and I want Lady Macbeth to be ugly and evil — Madama Taddea has the voice of an angel, and Lady Macbeth should be that of a devil."

Of course, Verdi didn't really mean all

that to be taken literally. Yet it was a sign of the times, and one of the important reasons why Verdi's *Macbeth* is such an operatic landmark, that he felt moved to write such opinions, so placed, in effect, for elegant consideration of the dramatic aspects of opera. Even today we are still plagued by far too many operatic productions that assume that fine singing is all that matters.

Another sign of the times was the fanaticism, by standards of the mid-19th century, amount of rehearsal Verdi demanded — and got — for *Macbeth*. Specifically the *Act I* scene following the master of Duncan, which is supposed to have had 181 runs through before the dress rehearsal.

John Shaw and Elizabeth Connell, who are playing the Macbeths in the current John Copley production for the Australian Opera, smile when that anecdote is recalled to the surface of their memory, but then, without linking it to any early stage of rehearsal — before Copley or the conductor, John Franchi, have had a chance to ask 181 rehearsals of them.

How did they approach the opera, when they first tackled the job of learning their enormous roles as Shakespeare with alterations and deletions, or as a separate work of art? Their answers are quite different.

"I went straight to Verdi and considered it as a separate work of art," says Connell. "I got it from the score. Verdi's stage directions are incredibly detailed — but going back to Shakespeare helps you to understand the role."

Shaw recalls that he first began to study the role of Macbeth at the suggestion of a former musical director of the Australian Opera, Edward Downes. "I went out and bought a Shakespeare and read it really before starting to learn the role at a leisurely pace." He, of course, is now an experienced agogic Macbeth (having first sung the role in 1980), while Connell is making her debut season on the part of his wife.

She admires Verdi's *Macbeth* in episode, but feels it is the best of all the Shakespearean operas written to date — bar, of course, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, which are acknowledged masterpieces. "Macbeth the opera is grossly under-rated," he says. "Sir Macbeth, in particular, is a very hard role to play. It creates immense emotional, as well as vocal, demands upon you. It takes a lot out of you than, say, *Requiem* does. Dramatic involvement is absolutely essential or it will collapse. Many opera performances can be judged on big display parts, there's money you can do that with Macbeth."

Partly this is a limit of the work itself, particularly in the revised version which is almost always performed today, but in the original *Lady Macbeth* was agitated and externalised while Macbeth's vocal part was reduced, internalising it even more than it was originally.

"As a character study, yes, the part more of a go than he does," writes Connell.

totally out of character, for an artist, in her capacity for her stage husband. Rather, adding, with a trace of the acid will one role will increasingly dominate their stage relationship as it matures. "I pray you all the time, dear!"

And Spens, of course, must agree.

"I'm looking forward to doing it," concedes Carroll.

"Gloriously unoriginal," mutters Spens.

"Of course we're not talking about a masterpiece," says John Copley over a plate of cold seafood and a glass of white wine, leaning back in contemplative silence, or perhaps the very sort of the Opera House window. "Oh, it is, it's a very flawed one."

He thinks a minute, then goes on. "The director's job is to glaze over the absurdities . . . like in the halo with nuggets of gold . . . like a dentist, it goes if it's done with panache . . . you don't give the people a chance to think."

Verdi's *Macbeth* has its problems, he admits, but really, he adds, it's a very straightforward piece. "What it needs is a lot of expertise. It's not easy for a designer, but it's no nightmare," says Copley.

The trap? "The banquet scene is one. By now, the Macbeths are very nervous. Nobody is at ease, nobody wants to come to the banquet, but they were forced to. I hate productions which make it too jolly." And the inherent politeness of Lady Macbeth's drinking song can be a problem. A director must make quite clear the dramatic irony of her trying to maintain

the good humor of her guests at the face of the virtual disintegration of their host before their very eyes.

Not to mention the scene involving the master of Banquo. "That's the most difficult," says Copley. "What do you do with Banquo?"

But Copley, who first did the piece in an amateur production for the Athenee Festival of 1968, is more concerned about budget problems than problems of direction that are raised. "We wanted to have a massive, strong, open set — no black and gold, no glitter, just a massive, atmospheric, sombre beauty. Nothing is going to move, no swords."

"I feel sometimes," he adds pensively, "that Australian audiences want glamour — something they can clap. But there's nothing light in the piece, it's sombre."

It is having trouble getting the sort of atmosphere he wants with Macbeth budget problems to blame. "It's things don't park up in the budget department," he manages himself. "You can do *Macbeth* on a bare stage, you know, if you have no revolving scenes."

Macbeth, back at the headquarters of the Australian Opera, a couple of miles east from the Opera House, the designer of the new *AO* *Macbeth*, Stefan Lanzenste, is supervising a mass fitting of characters costumes. Just about everything a black just the odd button or arm made out to catch the eye, over that relief is concealed away under a long black cloak

almost before it has a chance to register. "It's a black opera," says Lanzenste. Every scene takes place in night — not of course that makes it much easier and more economical to design. "We're doing it in a strong, tough-fabricated way, creating a very oppressive world and at the same time giving the impression that the macabre characters are trapped and isolated and lonely . . . alone."

The master splits Macbeth and Lady Macbeth — this is the end of their relationship. They wouldn't have had sex after that. They're hopelessly split, each going toward personal destruction."

Before designing the *Macbeth*, Lanzenste studied the Shakespeare original. "There are a lot of changes of balance in the plays," he says, "places where the emphasis has been shifted. It would have been a much grander opera if it had been written later in Verdi's career. It was too intense and savage a subject for what he was doing that . . . but even so, it was much better than most of the operas he was writing at that stage of his career. What worries is it is, ultimately, the soprano.

"Of course there are difficulties with a work like *Macbeth*, and you can't ignore the fact of their existence. But the music does work — it's very exciting, ultimate. Often powerful."

"You have to see it from Verdi's point of view, not Shakespeare's," he says, giving the impression he's doing just that right now.

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Over the past 140 years Sydney has seen more than dozen theatres built in the Central Business District, surpassing the Regent, which was originally built as a cinema for Marks Theatre Ltd, on a plot owned by J.C. Williamson Theatres.

Opposite: a painting of a theatre, the first of the three to be built in the 1850s, and the last to be built in the 1880s. The first theatre to be built in Sydney, and the second in Australia, was

theatre and the first of the present Royal and is at the corner of Pitt and Macquarie Street, of which little remains.

Sydney's Theatres Part 1



Theatre Royal, Sydney, c. 1850. A view of the building, taken from 1903.

Only a small part of the new Theatre Royal in the MLC Centre complex (King and Castlereagh Streets and Martin Place) follows the original site of the first theatre and its subsequent replacement until 1972. The original site hosted Castlereagh Street with an east-west axis, a later square, a side entrance through a building in King Street. The latest mid-nineteenth-century colonial-style building is, unfortunately, not erroneously, published as the front of the Theatre Royal.

The first Theatre Royal was erected for the Sydney under the name of Prince of Wales in 1851, being designed for Joseph Wyatt by Harry Robertson, who had previously designed Wyatt's Royal Victoria Theatre (opened 1849) in Pitt

Street. The height of the Royal was 1250 persons in a house divided into four tiers (balconies), two circles of large boxes and a gallery. However we must not be deceived into thinking that it was a large theatre by today's standards. The stage was approximately 40 feet wide behind the proscenium and 37 feet deep from the footlights but the pit was only 40 feet wide by 30 feet deep, thus allowing only 3.8 square feet of floor area per person. Compared to today's 3 to 3.5 square feet per person this accommodation was cramped, but certainly not unusually so for the time.

Melbourne's citizens measured the cost of this "opulent building" as 100,000 pounds, but in 1850 it was reduced to when issued for only 8,000 pounds. A year before its configuration there occurred an issue quite unusual in the annals of theatre history — a strike by the actors. This industrial dispute of November 1859 concerned the allegedly devious methods by which an entrepreneur, Charles Peake, was attempting to gain a monopoly of Sydney's theatres. It was claimed he was using unpaid salaries, rightfully due to stage and orchestra performers, for the purpose of obtaining the leases of Sydney's other two theatres.

The final straw was broken by his demand that all the company take a reduction in salary of 25% for the following three weeks. The dispute dragged well into 1860, the year that saw the disappearance of the first theatre on the site. Four fire engines and heavy men could not even complete demolition on the 3rd October of that year.

The second Prince of Wales was built to a "prior design" by J.H. Help for a Mr Fitzgerald Swaine. First contemporary description, to have the same accommodation as, agreed on 20th to the public on 23 May 1863. It was this theatre which commenced the link to King Street by constructing the stairs connecting between two blocks. This allowed the pit patrons, according to social custom of the time, to be segregated from the dress and upper circle patrons. The gallery patrons were similarly reduced from the time they stepped off Castlereagh Street.



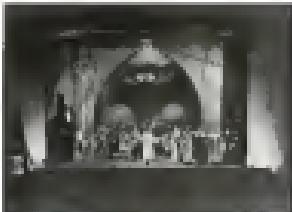
The interior of the Theatre Royal, Sydney, showing the ornate auditorium with tiered seating and balcony.

Lyttelton Royal Italian and English Opera Company performed at this theatre and stage realism was beginning to be an attraction as well. In 1863, in *Life of Lazarus*, there was, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "a correct model of a genuine Mississippi Steamer over forty feet long with all its machinery in perfect working order". Early one Saturday morning in January 1872 the Prince of Wales Opera House and adjacent buildings were one "immense conflagration mass — lighting up the city all around". The theatre was almost entirely consumed.

The last theatre, The Royal, opened in December 1874. It was also designed by J.H. Help, being again of similar dimensions to the other two buildings, except there were now only three levels, providing more bedrooms for patrons. Some of the walls and structure existed for the next 90 years although the exterior design changed



The Royal Theatre, Sydney, was the third theatre to be built on the site, opening in 1874. It was designed by J.H. Help.



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Fortunately we can obtain some good idea of the interior of this church because after a comparatively small fire in 1892 it was exhibited as it was restored closely to the design of 1757. Photographs by Peter in the Mitchell Library show the result of the fire and the rebuilt church with its decorative one-tier columns supporting the three circular and gallery ends with their blue and green.



The United and RSC had held the position of first players and horses of opera beauties on Sydney JC Williamson and wife Maggie Moore had been introduced the works of Collins and Sullivan, and as well as George Rognvald, Dean Rosenthal, Nellie Kemmett, and others performing here, a Mrs Armstrong sang to a series of concerts in 1888. Later she became better known as Nellie Melba.

With the addition of a fly-lover over the stage after the 1893 fire the theatre remained much the same until Henry White redesigned the interior in 1911 and replaced the front by Castleford Street. This is the original design with its green Robert Adam style plasterwork and red drapes which we all remember although the ground floor covered was little changed in area from those when the earlier theatres housed over 2000 people.

This last theme was, for Sydney, from the days of the Great Depression until the conversion of the League into the Ministry, the home of J.C. Williamson. It housed these various musical societies of the amateur classes, with Charles Monksmith, then the new American maestro of the forces and early films. It was where the University Bands commenced its sessions in Sydney and it was a base of the Ballet Russe and other visiting troupes.



The musical themes left for the most part the Rajah in the end-bliss but it contained very much as a drama and esthetic theatre with the final performance by the Royal Shakespeare Company on 29th April 1973. This show deserved a rather remarkable series of events.



For the first time in Australia many disease members of the community demanded an attempt to save the Theatre Royal, or at least obtain a replacement. The developers had only planned to construct a cinema on the site as well as a shopping centre, open plan and retail along one block and car parking. Angus Equity and John Taylor in particular, organized publicity and public meetings



Editorial Review Board, 1999

The committee established was joined by Jack Munday of the Builders Labourers Federation. The community response was encouraging and the *Sydney Morning Herald* (11.3.72) summed up its feelings:

To the suggestion to use the Royal's stones as the cornerstone of a crowd, the plan of extraordinary potential, the image which immediately came to mind was that of a not particularly distinguished in a city centre already being defaced over a community of dreams and aspirations as might

Within a week of closure of the old building a new theatre on the site was announced. On 11th May Land-Lesse Corporation Ltd wrote to the Lord Mayor stating that it would erect a new theatre to be known as the Theatre Royal to be used only as a first professional theatre "at which performances using local talent, will be given preference".

Architects Harry Seidler designed the new theatre in association with theatre consultant Tom Brown. The only part of the site available fronted King Street and ran north-south, backing onto old Rose Street. The design had to take one of the first floor rooms, which contained the offices



It is a pleasure to thank Professor Dr. Leo Goldstein, Harry S. Truman

Black above, and near the Banbury
Suburb railway branch below.

The resultant design is a radical adaptation of a typical old-style proscenium theatre. It is well planned on a difficult site, and at stage level there is good delivery access and space, particularly beneath House Street, for storing the scenery of important or prestigious productions. The stage has a high fly tower and the design of the stage lighting galleries across the ceiling of the auditorium are excellent. It seats comfortably within a red and gold environment, 1,000 persons and cost approximately 34,000,000. (An art inflated inventory value it is 66 times the cost of the first theatre.)

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Celebrating Marlowe

KING EDWARD THE SECOND

CLIFF GILLIAM

King Edward The Second by Christopher Marlowe. The Note in the Wall Theatre, Perth, West Australia. Director, John Milson; designer, Graham Mackinnon.

Paul Cummins, Sir John of Gaunt, Earl of Lancaster, Lighorne, Richard Williams, three poor men, Isan King, Mary Blane, David Holmes, King Edward the Second, Robert Van Mackebenberg, Lord Merton, Bishop of Coventry, Edgar Maccall, Earl of Lancaster, herald, an abbot, Gasney, Bill Massa, Earl of Pembroke, Spenser, Mardon, Alan Fletcher, Edward, Earl of Kent, Phil Williamson, Archdeacon of Canterbury, Bullock, Earl of Arundel, Isan King, Queen Isabella, Joan Sydeney, Lady Margaret De Clare, Mary Hahn, Prince Edward, a speaker, David Holmes.

Perth theatre audiences have been extremely well served by the Note in the Wall during 1977. Under director John Milson, the policy of the last couple of years has been consistent which has meant that, along with the cold safe-fair money sponsor, productions have been given of many plays whose box-office potential has been uncertain, to say the least, but which have had the merit of keeping in contact, by alert both to the potential and the value of the live theatre as a medium.

This policy has meant that we have seen new plays by new writers, both Australian and foreign (one thinks particularly of Peter Finch and Cecily Negeff) and also the less-controversial masterworks by established writers, but we have always seen plays which offer more than West End broadways, and productions which are really ones oriented in and committed to live theatre.

As it has begun, as it goes on, *After a life* the next season of O'Neill's massive masterpiece, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, is a production brilliantly directed by Raymond Quilty, and featuring a level of performance from Maxine Tindall, Mackebenberg, Bullock, and Mardon, Astell and Moody, consistently higher than anything I've ever seen in years here in Perth. John Milson has followed up with the strongly staged Marlowe shrewdly-tragedy *Edward II*.

I have never really understood why *Edward II* is so infrequently performed, since it seems to me the Marlowe play best suited to modern taste. It belongs of course to the tradition of the chronic play, and in fact depicts "the problematic reign and lamentable death" of its eponymous protagonist over some twenty plays.

Yet it does so with amazing speed and economy, without ever adapting into documentary codum, and it accomplishes this largely by its running dual focus — a focus both on the king himself and the conflict between his nature and the demands of his position, and on the forces ranged against that nature as collected and impersonated in the redoubtable Marlowe.

The glorious hyperbolic characteristics of Marlowe in plays like *Tamburlaine* and *Dr Faustus* is lacking in *Edward II*, having been replaced by a rhetoric better suited to the pace of the action. Layered and economically effective in its delineation of the one and threat of the conflict between the king and his barons.

Milson's production takes advantage of the quality which gives the play its pace, the montage of brief scenes swelling toward major crises such as the execution of Gascoigne, and the abdication of the king. Another inspired collaboration with designer Graham Mackinnon has allowed him to set the scenes in a space suggestion of a medieval thrust stage, but with different levels to the floor which allow for transitions to battlefield or the court of France with remarkable ease. Shells in lightning turn the palace of chaos and the mouth of tree with figures cut-out from those rooms to dungeon and torture chamber in less than a moment.

The play exhibits a symmetry in structure, Marlowe using an Edward folk, which is evident throughout this production, from the scene lists of the cast, to the careful orchestration of scenes of confrontation between Edward and his barons (which would easily have become messy in the small area of the Note's playing space), down to the masterstroke of having Richard Williams's double the parts of Gascoigne and Lighorne, the king's lover and murderer respectively.

Wilson made extremely effective use of only 11 players to fill the twenty-five speaking parts of the play. Performances were generally strong, but much of the force and power of the production came from the superb playing of Robert Van Mackebenberg as Edward and Edgar Maccall as Mardon. Van Mackebenberg brought a particular vulnerability to the role of Edward II. "What governed" by his passion for Gascoigne, and later suddenly protective in his choice of Spenser as a new paramour.

Impat at politics and policies in his strategy at battle, Edward II is a character difficult to sympathise with until he is forced to suffer a grotesquely cruel imprisonment and death. Yet Mackebenberg managed to gain the audience's sympathy from the beginning, being absolutely convincing about the forces of the king's passion for Gascoigne.

His appearance in a simple white robe of mourning after Gascoigne is killed again was finely handled. He appeared as a medieval icon, a first Gascoigne white with a beard of "formal cut", and the entire performance was marked by this sense of splendour, his movement particularly be-



Edgar Maccall and Joan Sydeney in *Edward the Second*

ing a raster of a gashed flow from come-
to-second goes.

The contrast between the king and the
courtier creates writing in the mould of
his representations, curled like a child in the
arms of his entertainers, sprawled under
a table, waiting to receive a mystery
death, brought an added dimension of
honor to what is itself one of the most
harrowing scenes in English dramatic
literature. In this scene and in the abduc-
tion scene, Van Maasdorpberg proved once
and for all that he possesses the technique,
the control and the skills of a master of fa-
pervision.

Balancing him was another master,
Edgar Mitchell. Physically compact,
tightly determined in both his bated and
his bantam, Mitchell's Mortimer was ex-
tremely convincing, both proud and convinc-
ing. This was no slight Machiavellian, but a
loose and fervent man of many parts,
the last scenes with Isabella revealing
tenderness too as part of his range of
passions.

Joan Sydney played Isabella, the queen
caught between the contempt of her belov-
ed king and the ambition of 'proud Morti-
mer'. This is a difficult role, since the
change in the queen's attitude to Edward
after her return with Mortimer from
France seems too rapidly accomplished in
terms of the action of the play. The mystery
of her duplicity and frustration,
her unswerving fidelity in the first two acts
clash violently with her callousness in the
last. If the play has a weakness it is this
role, yet Joan Sydney made of it also
something memorable.

Richard Williams took the part of
Giovanni, as well as doubling as the cold
French as English lord, and managing at
the end of the play as Lightfoot, the
ironically aptly named murderer. As Peter
Quinton, Williams was excellent — like
strong, fearless, determinedly sexual, his
passions give substance to the conflict
between King and Baron over the proper
government of the realm.

Giovanni is intelligent and passionate,
self-dramatically proud perhaps, but
Williams also made him big enough to
trigger real conflict in a kingdom. With
Van Maasdorpberg he exhibited an em-
pathy in the play that carried over
beautifully into the last scenes, where, as
the nation's valid Lightfoot, the con-
siderer of noble deaths, he achieved another
series of tendernesses between king and
paramour while confirming his intended
victim.

Many of the minor roles were doubled
by Alan Fletcher, Bill Mason and Isabe
King and their playing was generally com-
petent and in key with the style of the
production. Ivan King made a delightful
comes of the laughably witty scholar-
opportunist Beldock.

John Milson's programme notes an-
nounce the production as a celebration of
Christopher Marlowe — and so it is. It is
also a personal triumph for Milson, who
made in this particular chronicle play a
tragedy of passions which could be effi-

ciently done in a style of hot-house intimacy
such as that encouraged by the dimensions
of the Helen-in-the-Wall Theatre. We are
fortunate to have had the chance to see this
play at all — to see a so successfully done
it to get closer with the brush.

Two plays from the 'Golden Age of American Drama'

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT

OF MICE AND MEN

MARGOT LUKE

Long Day's Journey into Night by Eugene
O'Neill, State in the Wall Theatre, Perth,
WA. Opened 27 August 1977. Director
and designer, Raymond Gosselin.
James Tyrone, Neville Tonks; Mary Cough-
ran, Margaret Anstall; June, Helen
van Maasdorpberg; Edmund, Graeme
Birchcock; Curley, John Monash.

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck
Playhouse, Perth, WA. Opened 22
September 1977.
Director, Alan Nease, designer, Sue
Russell; George, Trevor Hart; Lennie,
Robert Fappinet; Candy, Colin Borges;
The Boss, Geoff Gibbs; Curley, Martin
James; Curly's wife, Leah Taylor; Slim,
Linda Wright; Carlson, Alan Cressell;
Whit, Ian Dohle; Crooks, Peter Rawley.

Looking back, one can only describe it as a forgotten Golden Age in the history
of American Drama. More especially the
play had been ousted by later, more
idiosyncratic, more cerebral writers.
Now both O'Neill's family drama
and Steinbeck's great peasant epic
have returned and prove to be relevant ex-
periences, chronicled the more for their
'otherness'. They are sustained by
affiliative emotion. They take their time
to establish their theme without nervously
peering over their shoulder to see if the
audience is getting restless. They achieve a
solidity and weight that goes beyond the
intellect (unless, of course, of Birchcock
practically bypassing it), and involves in
the business of being human rather than in
using it to approximate brilliant studies of
the human condition.

There are dangers, of course, both of the
plays, lesser especially on the brink of
moldiness and one, for an actor playing in
a cynical consciousness, audience, more
readily difficult to sustain. Larger-than-
life characters, except as caricatures, have
gone out of fashion, as has compassion.
The well-worn theme would be untenable
as a contemporary play, except as a stylized
fable — Kasper, at the heart of *Long Day's*
— or as a sick joke. Similarly the

collection of tortured wrecks in the O'Neill
play would be impossible to present
straight by a post-O'Neill and post-Albee
writer. They would need to be seen as
samples of American Gothic.

There is, despite this kind of ethereal
no comparison in the size or scope of the two
plays. *Long Day's Journey* is a part of the
drama — *Of Mice and Men* is a literary
curiosity, a narrative venture into the
realm of theatre. The one is panoramic,
creating an involved net of family
relations, exploring the universalized
tragedy of a lifetime, while the other
sketches, in bold outlines, the human
relationship between two people whose
limitations are as themselves the theme of
the play. They make totally different
demands on both the actors and the
audience, and you, the end result is sur-
prisingly similar — an admiration of the
sheer logic and vitality created, a satisfaction
of both the emotions and the intellect.
Because, whatever the post-Brechtian
playgoer might have been taught, it is not
absolutely necessary for an audience to be
educated in order to start thinking.

In producing *Long Day's Journey* at the
Helen-in-the-Wall, Ray Gosselin turned
what could easily have been a headache
into an asset. O'Neill's people could be an
entertainment in a very small theatre.
Old James Tyrone has a florid temper and
also indulges in bawdy reminiscences and
recollections. Mary Tyrone is a drag ad-
dact who becomes steadily bawdier as the
play progresses. Their two sons have their
share of posturings and theatrics.

Everyone squirms at the top of their
seats. Very disgruntled ground this. And yet — it worked. In the first place, by
removing the auditorium as an extension of
the Tyrone's living room, there was a feel-
ing of being present as part of a happening,
rather than a sense of detachment and in-
congruity. One was, in fact, rather wedged
between the two in witness to this intensely
personal drama at such close quarters.

The casting was extraordinarily
successful, making the note striking by the
fact that there was no type-casting (often
inevitable with the comparatively
bland reservoir of talent in an isolated
community). Neville Tonks, probably
associated with every floridty colour (although one does recall a memorable
state Purdy), is very impressive as the
complex James-Tyrone. Family tyrant and
ragged ageing man, muscle Irritante,
and over-successful married old, at odds
with his sons one minute, drinking com-
panions the next, living past glories and
regretting failures.

He assumes compassion, but not decide-
gely, he handles the emotional atmosphere
delicately, he is compassionate being blown up
and then deflated, self-doubt fighting with
self-awareness, or clichéd
presentations of love being displaced by
genuinely-felt emotion. The length of the
play — all three-and-a-half hours of it —
allows for the ebb and flow of emotion.
Particularly the quarrel scenes between
father and sons are choreographed with a

sure looking for the credible breaking-point after almost unbearable emotional tension.

Margaret Atherton, whose own life has grown so associate with elegant, cool and occasionally bawdy ladies, turned Mary Tyrone into a study of solvent and steel. In her performance the play's debilitative device of deception was developed most intelligently. Early in the piece there is a pernicious sort of self-sacrifice and selfless. Farnham doesn't talk or act like that above or below. That quality of sense as first appears as gaudiness on the part of playwright or producer.

Only gradually does it become clear that the entire family is playing a grim charade, with Mary Tyrone using the part of the pampered countess, secure in the bosom of her family, and everyone else in the role of supporting cast. The jiving ages of Farnham, half-givenover, gradually give way to deliberate and blatant deception, guilt and ruthless despair as the family gradually acknowledge the unbearable truths so far kept suppressed. As Mary becomes more honest about her addiction, the honey-sweet lady of the first scene gradually turns into a tigress, before switching off into cool madness. A star-mung performance all round.

Gerald Hitchcock, whom we had not previously seen in a major role, plays the part of Lorraine, the younger son (whom we may take to be closest to the prototy of the author himself). Farnham first appears as the obviously blind and younger in his final speech there is a sudden discernible growth in the character towards maturity.

It is a paradox essential of writer, director and actor achieving an able integration that one cannot segregate their individual contributions. Although Hitchcock's fresh-faced looks do not fit in with one's idea of the youthful O'Neill, the effect is particularly powerful when, towards the end of the play, he has to plunge from the heights of poetic exaltation (poetic despair) to the bitter disillusionments with both brother and mother — we suddenly see him grow into a tragic man sprung before his last.

The older brother, played by Robert van Manen, is an ungratified part — sitting in the dark corners of unimportance — shouting in the shrillness late to Edmond's poetic resilience.

John Moody made welcome brief appearances as an Irish maid — being without being intrusively cutesy.

In both plays the American dream is represented by the theme of land purchase and settling down. In both of them there is the theme of life-partnership and incomparably bring the bane of tragedy.

Long Day's Journey is aching in the way it resembles a mass of dead and a dramatic pattern. The Steinbeck play works the opposite way. All the elements of human relationship are simplified and focused into the disillusioned part of mother, Lorraine and George.

George is a cut above the average career worker. He has dreams, and over

a practical plot to make them reality. They involve the purchase of a small farm and settling down to be his own boss. He shares his dreams with Lorraine, his protégé, who is strong in body but has the mind of a retarded child, and represents the closest thing to a family. George persuades George to move enough to keep that of the deteriorated life of the characters over the burden is lighter than no human attachment at all. He grooms about the changes in life he has caused through having to consider Lorraine, but it is the intelligent grubbing of an intelligent parent.

While the O'Neill play the richly woven tapestry makes each discovery of the figures in the pattern a surprise, in the Steinbeck play the area is already marked for any straightforward. Once the play is known that Lorraine's uncontrollable strength will lead to disaster. As the play opens he is fending a mouse he lifted unthinkingly and is escaping from a situation that arose because he frightened a girl, equally unthinkingly.

The events in store are predictable — their power is, in fact, dependent on our certainty of the inevitability of the outcome, and our concern is with the way the playwright will get there.

The play is saved from both sentimentalism and sentimentalism by Steinbeck's sharp observation of the language, attitude and lifestyle of the ranch hands. He shows the inevitable result of hard physical labour, belligerence and visits to the brothel as a backdrop against which they develop their own subculture, with its own folklore and racy language.

The figure of Lorraine presents a problem, of course. The inherent sententiousness of

the characterisation is mitigated with touches of knowing the superbly bony Lorraine, waiting to know for the moment's time about the inclusions will tend easily to make refreshingly irritating with her child-like demands for Ricketts at his beams or threats of going away to live in a cave by herself. His over-rapid acceptance of George's authority and apparently makes the scene when he makes out at the hunting-hut's sun all the more dramatic.

Bob Fossett avoids all the danger that could have resulted in a desultory "comes" and plays his less as ideas and more like a bantamish child. Trevor Hart as George shows a remarkable strength in the matter-of-fact playing of George. Of the supporting roles, only the non-guy Slim played by Leslie Wright in campy Western-style comes close to being a character, and it is clear that they are all primarily meant to function as an enhancement of the central figures.

Linus Taylor has the difficult task of integrating the two people who seem to make up Corley's wife. The playwright presents her as an uninteresting, prevaricating sort in the first act, and a partner, mother ally and lively young Steinbeck girl in the second. The sense in which she and Lorraine elaborate their dreams of the future, each usually unaware of what the other is saying is played with wonderfully naive humour, blending most skilfully into the tragedy of the unmastered muscle.

It is a tribute to the direction of Anne Ninnes that the unapologetically material and (George) pessimistic Lorraine to "say" their chosen place in the distance while he shoots her in a generously moving



Shirley Brooks and Gerald Hitchcock in *Long Day's Journey into Night*



Kevin Miles (Buffalo Bill), Lester Devos (Power Bill), Dorothy Vernon (Annie) and Roger Barry (Frank Butler) in *Annie Get Your Gun*.

A worthwhile innovation and an engaging enough evening

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN

TONY BAILLIE

Annie Get Your Gun music and lyrics by Irving Berlin, book by Herbert Fields and Dorothy Fields. South Australian Theatre Company, Playhouse, Festival Centre, Adelaide, SA. Opened 28 August 1977.

Dancers, Celia George, Josselyn, Rosalie Foss, musical director, Joanne Rose, movement, Michael Fenton, Charles Corcoran, Linda Hodgeson, Dolly Tott, Stephen Grey, Wayne Tott, Edith Russell, Terence Colan, Pauline, Miss Craig, Andrew Foster, William Leslie, Debbie, Franka, Roger Barry, Buffalo Bill, Kevin Miles, Annie Get Your Gun, Lester Devos, Annie, Dorothy Vernon, Leslie Jole, Anne Gaskin, Jason, Michael Taylor, Nola, Michael John Taylor, Dorothy George, Alwyn Holloway, Lucy George, Pamela Barnard, a 1927 New York box set, Dona Scott, 1927 Little House, Sophie Ann Peacock, 1927 Rock Town, Circus Act, Charles, conductor, Michael Sherriff, piano, Kirk, Phil Hart, Michael, Sophie Peacock, production, Lynn Kennedy, Chet Smith, Edith, Shirley Collier, Show, Jason, Michael, Esther, Michaela, Michaela, Marjorie, Philippa, Power, a, conductor, Michael Sherriff, writer, Ann Flynn, choreo, Michael French, Michael Lynn, Chet Smith.

No one can fault Celia George, now very much the dominant spirit at the South Australian Theatre Company, for innovation.

Since his takeover as artistic director this year the company has presented two classics (*Barbary for Scoundrels* and *The Cherry Orchard*) a revue around Ruth Crockett (Dame Ruth), a revised Arthur Miller (*Death of a Salesman*), a new Australian play (*Ron Barry Too Kind To Say*), a session of play readings and now a middlebrow musical in *Annie Get Your Gun*.

Not to mention many changes of personnel, the emergence of a distinctive design style and a very active theatre in education programme.

Mr George's innovations in staging *Annie Get Your Gun* are apparent, if a bit clichéd, directorial ambitions of attracting a new audience. A very commendable ambition, too, from the man in charge of a heavily subsidised company in a city where there is a dirty word and, from time to time, a political one.

Let it be said, also, that the session of middlebrow which restored *The Playhouse* for the first night seemed to have a striking good time.

Unfortunately, however, they saw the SATC as at least professional to date under Mr George.

For a start the Berlin-Fields *Annie* has not won well. It is an odd match that it is a schmaltzy showbiz and faintly sexist in a sour world of literate investments, in a

uniquely that *Annie*, JC Superstar and *A Little Night Music*, to name but three, have heightened audience expectations from musicals. To call a spade a spade, in 1977 *Annie* cracks.

Secondly and most unfortunately the SATC have run foul of that old problem that managers have trouble ageing and actors have trouble singing. Most of them, indeed, had considerable trouble.

These problems were exacerbated by the casting of Dorothy Vernon as Annie Oakley. She proved to be one of the better singers, she is a more skin actress, she is an attractive woman with a smile that focus one to reach for that regal click evident but she is a matron and, frankly, a substantial one, while the costume she wears did nothing to lessen her physical impact.

Opposite her Bruce Barry made a much more convincing Frank Butler. His "My Deafness Ain't Deaf" with the male company was something of a show stopper in the grand old tradition. But elsewhere he too had difficulty getting the music from some of the songs.

Of the others, Edwin Hodgeman's Charlie Devosport was typically professional, Kevin Miles' Buffalo Bill repeated a western gait many of his mannerisms as Prusik in *The Cherry Orchard*, Douglas Grey's Daily Tom was over-emphatic and Hedley Collier's Singin' Bull splendidly lugubrious.

Rodney Ford's design was again both practical and flamboyant with ingenious and unashamedly stagey sets such as a train and much horses. Mr Ford has now returned to England but while here he was a major acquisition for the SATC opening up and brightening the *Playhouse*. Hopefully his re-entrance will longer last.

Smaller talent was evident from Michael Fenton, the company's spy director, and movement master. His Judas' conventional director's assistant was as effusive and attractive as his previous ball scene in *The Cherry Orchard*.

The orchestra directed by Joanne Rose was good and nobly resisted the temptation to dominate the cast.

In sum then, a worthwhile innovation and an engaging enough evening but one had to make too many allowances for real enjoyment.

South Australia rates in two heavily subsidised State companies, the SATC and State Opera. Perhaps for the new musical, and there is no reason why it should not be an annual event, they should get together

Never mind the why and wherefore

FLAUS, PINAFORI

MICHAEL MORLEY

Al of S. Pinafore by Gilbert and Sullivan. The State Opera at the Festival Theatre, Adelaide. Sat. 25. October 1977. (10 September 1878). Conductor: Peter Hylands; director: Adrian Stark; set designs: Jim Cooper; costumes: Glynis Hall; lighting: Alan Ross; stage manager: Lyn Symes.

Mr. WOOD: Tenor; RUSSELL: Bass; DUNSTER: David Bremner; HILL: Robert Keith Thompson; MULBY: Christopher Thomas Edwards; CAPTAIN COOPER: John Wood; FREDERICA: Patsy Thompson; SIR JOSEPH: Peter Woodward; MUSICAL DIRECTOR: Leslie Dalling; SET DESIGN: Maurice Rouse.

In the face of the anomalous popular success of State Opera's current production of *H M S Pinafore* (all our boisterous enthusiasm may rightly appear perverse at, as W C Fields would have it, pay you to critics what the public wants and presently likes) the while this *Pinafore* does contain individual performances of much merit and related moments when it starts to look like something other than a carbon or Xerox copy of one of the Savoy operas, the evening is on the whole something of a disappointment.

Although *Pinafore* has never been my personal favorite among Gilbert and Sullivan comic operas — *The Gondoliers* is musically more inventive, *The Mikado* dramatically more effective — it was the first I saw as a professional production

interestingly enough (well at least to this reviewer) two clearly remembered features of that production, just 20 years ago, are complemented and confirmed by the cast. I have no recollection whatever of the rather Sir Joseph Porter and a very weird one of a Captain Cawson, who physically and vocally was impressive and foreboding. And the one number which really stood out for its squatting mass and splendid shaping — "Never Mind the Why and Wherefore" — received a similarly energetic and neatly choreographed performance in this production.

As for the imbalance aped above between Sir Joseph and Captain Cawson — well nothing could be less like the earlier Captain than John Wood's bantam, rotund yet acrobatic characterization. The common denominator is the fact that he steals the show and makes Edward Woodward's Sir Joseph appear pallid and underplayed.

No doubt Mr Woodward's presence in the cast has served to recall audiences yet it is not simply because of the (inevitable) comparisons with the superlative Dennis Ogle that his performance suffers. The first entry — climbing clumsily up the ship's rigging — looks all too convincing whereas surely the essential requirement for any performers of these central Gilbertian comic roles is the ability to make a balloon, still of such clumsiness (Mr Ogle's infinite capabilities in this area).

But one could accept this lack of physical ability if it were replaced by something analogous in terms of gestural, phrasalisation, vocal skills. Alas, there is little in Mr Woodward's performance which strikes the right note (so to speak), as his singing was by no means inaccurate or unconvincing. In may be that a brief guidance from the director — in such areas as rope climbing — might have helped. For one suspects that not only Mr Woodward but the cast as a whole have not received much assistance in acquiring either a traditional Gilbertian or appropriately anti-Gilbertian style.

It may seem impertinent to critique an actor for whose talents I have great admiration, but Mr Woodward's reading of the role lacks proportion, size and an awareness of how to play off his fellow performers. One can make allowances for the difficulties involved in tackling such a role by the first guru, but for the viewer it is well rather like watching a trained squirrel scramble around the 400 centimetre hurdles.

No such reservations about the performances of John Wood and Patsy Thompson. The first was easily the best thing in the production in my experience a most unattractive view of the part, yet one that worked splendidly. Looking rather like a British naval equivalent of Hassel's Good Soldier Schatzkäfer and full of the same ebullience and energy, his Captain Cawson was witty, light-footed and vocally sound.



John Wood, (Captain Cawson) and, Patsy Thompson in the State Opera's *H M S Pinafore*. Photo: Lorraine Chinnell.

He may not have the magnetism usually associated with the role but this was more than compensated for by his animated delivery and some wonderfully deft physical business. An always reliable performer, John Wood showed in this role what a considerable asset he is (was?) to the Company.

Although there is less scope for individual characterization in the role of Josephine, Paulette Hargreaves made her mark more than the facious sorghum she usually becomes. Her voice seemed a little un-focused in "Sorry for her but" with one or two pitch problems in the upper register, but she soon made up for these in "Mammoth Hair" 'The House Creep on Apple' in the second act, was consistently phrased and sang with fine tonal softening, and she was deliciously pert and appealing in the ensemble.

Thomas Edwards was a good voice as Ralph and displayed rather more presence than usual and David Brummie made a possibly unwise Dick Chudley — completely with cut of nose, tail, eye patch, long and blackened teeth, while soundly refusing from the temptation to play the part the same Portsmouth twin brother of Quasimodo.

Musically, the evening was not an unqualified success. The choruses were well-drilled, the ensembles precise, the sound pleasant — and for the most part singularly lacking in wit, humour and sheer enthusiasm. This may have been attributable in some measure to the placing of the singers and the dry acoustic but the weaknesses were not only in these areas.

One can admire Myer Fredman's attention to detail and his moulding of the chorus. But this group of sailors sounded genteel where it should have been rollicking, well-controlled where a touch of wildness was called for and less-square rhythms in "Julius" was because very little of them are maintained so uniformly as this was (one noted the same weakness in Mr Fredman's earlier reading of Weill's *Treasure Opera*). If both singers and actors had been in a better mood and the result may have been less than tidy but certainly more invigorating.

The same lack of vigour was noticeable in Andrew Black's production of Agnes from "Never Mind the Why and Wherefore". most of the set pieces were somewhat tame. Admittedly, the production simply needed some of the excessive clomping that is often introduced to make up for other deficiencies, but a little more of the John Wood view of character and style would have helped the chorus considerably.

It is the familiarity of the Survey operas which is both their strength and their weakness. One other seeks — as the producer appears to — to make the familiar even rarer (which means that the music receives more than a share of

attention) or else one tries the more uncertain path.

This may be more fulfilling but also more rewards in the production than are found for instance, Gilbert's view of the English comic system and his analysis of social behaviour were always marked by a studied unreverence — a quality replaced in this production by an opposite reverence learnt by rote.

A harsh judgement perhaps, but surely now the copyright question is no longer the problem it was, the night before a *Ring* which does not set before the audience the same trial which they have been trying for the last three generations. It may well be set out on a different chariot service but the temperature, ingredients and taste have remained constant. And — to pursue the culinary metaphor — in Gilbert's own words the result was very much "taken with unquenching cream".

Why did they do it?

CITY SUGAR

PETER MARD

City Sugar by Stephen Petekoff. South Australian Theatre Company, Playhouse, Adelaide. Opened 6 October, 1973.

Director, Bruce Debrusk; design, John Corrigan; lighting, Bruce Gary; Mrs. Rita, Jim Holt; Big John, David Harschauer; Nicols Duran, Michael Stoyan; Sam, Laine Grugan; Jim Redel Russell.

About the South Australian Theatre Company's production of *City Sugar* enough really has been said by now.

It was a terrible mistake. The play simply should not have been produced by a theatre company in search of a reputation for competence.

The cast tried, and perhaps so did the director, but the material was repulsive and raw. The awful banality, caprice and cynicism of commercial radio, and how in relationship with characters and causes it simply is to a somewhat barren voice of the market place masquerading as wholesome entertainment, is a theme worth pursuing, but not in *City Sugar's* unpolished way.

The play was presented as the South Australian Theatre Company's part of an Adelaide commercial radio station's "Life Festival", an event that in itself was a mixed bag of varieties and generic popular cultural events. And some marks therefore have to be awarded to the SACTC for in fact producing a play that tried to advance a critical point of view, but not many.

A large transistor radio impatiently twisted itself into, first, a radio news

station, then a supermarket area, and then a ranger's bedroom. In these three areas we watched how a Doc Jockey by the name of Legion Head conducted a radio competition assisted by Rax (his technician) and Big John, the station's new co-host. Nicols Duran is the supermarket girl who enters the competition but does not win, and the decisions that with her friend Sam and Jim miss the prize. And that is I have rarely seen an audience so unreconciled by rote.

So the question is worth asking, why did the South Australian Theatre Company produce such a dismal catastrophe?

Was it simply a lapsus in taste, or does it indicate a more fundamental and structural disability?

Since Mt Cala Georgia took over as Artistic Director early this year, Adelaide theatre audiences and SACTC subscribers have been treated to *School for Scandal*, *All My Sons*, *The Cherry Orchard*, two short one-plays, one by Ron Blair and the other by Michael Corte, *Bath Cracknell* as *Foot Rash*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, and *City Suger*.

Yet to come are *Macbeth* and *John O'Deaughan's A Major and Holy Deceit*, as well as the old-folks and yet in an over-long-light in the company's theatre-in-education activity under the direction of Roger Chapman.

On paper it's not a bad line up of potentially significant events, but it can hardly be denied gripping. Indeed, the most significant and important theatre event in Adelaide so far this year was National Theatre's *Black Arts About Nothing*, which really showed its audience and I hope the SACTC appreciate how to produce with inventiveness, style and relevance.

Colin George's direction of *School for Scandal* was excellent. The production worked, the play had great charm and dash. There was a sense of theatrical maturity and intelligence about the whole production. The design by Rodney Ford was excellent. But then followed a blossoming *Cherry Orchard*, a dull and heavy-handed *All My Sons*, *Annie Get Your Gun* which was a sell-out in both issues of the run, and now *City Sugar*. Only Ann Ruth and Ron Blair and Michael Corte's pieces are remembered as having a rare sense of dramatic tension about them.

Annie Get Your Gun can only be justified on the grounds that it brought into the playhouse theatre a great many people who would otherwise never have sat long in the place, which is something like an excuse. But not a good one. The fact that the Company decided to play it straight is the most, central, and I believe damning, omission to reflect about the production. And it stands as a symbol of the 1973 season up to *City Sugar* at least — that is to say, a season and a management company that is rigorously moving it known not where, because too often it is simply running on the spot.



Terence's mother would be proud

MISS LITCHFIELD'S RIVERINA FOLLIES

MARQUETTE WELLS

Miss Litchfield's Riverina Follies, devised by the Company Riverina Tramping Company at Riverina CAC, Wagga Opened 22 September, 1977

With Kim Hardwick, Sharne Hines, Jenny Leslie, Ron Moffat, Terry O'Connell, Troy Peacock, Miss Rose Litchfield, Julie Whispe, Roy Mallory's Rhythm Boys, Jeff Brown, (Siddley/mouth harp), Alan Cottrell, (keyboards), Mylyn O'Meara, (guitar/vocals), Gary Petersen, (guitar).

Miss Rose Litchfield is a lady of a gentility almost divine. You can see it in the way she twists a neatly permed curl further into place or puts a diamond ear ring. Not pretentious, dear me, no, just a little remembrance that the exquisite picture of bolts of perfection that she presented five minutes ago has not been marred in the passing of time.

As doyenne of the *Riverina Follies*, which has played from Adelong to Tumbarumba and made the history of the Riverina Riverina world wide, she has a personal in-

terest, no doubt, in keeping the stage clean (though with a clearly displayed social consciousness that must make her and her troupe leaders of the Adelong Tramping set), and glittering with family fan.

So, while directing the performance vigorously from the audience and filling in with a torch for a spot when the lighting fails, she still finds time to keep up with world events through the pages of the *Woman's Weekly*, and to ensure that young Terence O'Connell has written his weekly letter to his mother who wonders about him.

Young Terence's mother would be proud of him, though if she could see him tramping the bush, a somewhat ragged, on the Wagga leg of the Adelong — Wagga — Zanbarra tour.

One of his songs, *Home made roses* (which he wrote with young Rosette Moffat, another of the six Follies troupe), would have brought tears of pride to her eyes, as it brought tears of laughter to the audience's. It was all good clean fun for the soldiers and their girls at the swinging centre of Riverina capital, the Coconut Grove. (We were at 1944 at the time.) How much sweat was the floor show, a pleasant song, song with fire, amusement, and words that went straight to the heart — or the stomach — it was a recipe for enthusiasm and absolute delight!

The inventiveness of the Riverina Tramping Company, in putting together this brilliant and beautiful show in four weeks, and in writing the twenty-one songs

that studded it, is simply staggering. The wealth of material that they found about them, of the history, and of imagery, of the Riverina, makes the cockles of a sentimental heart. Though the craze was generally in the American show, it was about Australians, by Australians, for Australians and without a trace of cynicism.

They seemed to feel no need to prove the legitimacy of Australian tradition, however short, as a worthy subject for theatre. They invented it and went from there. And there was nothing tentative about the way they went, as their audacious treatment of the recycle John Mori, shown.

Captain Mori had a sister.
 So he named the towns all wrong.
 He named Wagga Wagga,
 He named Gung Gung Gung
 And these were not the only names.
 That Captain Mori created.
 He called Gandy 'Gandy Gandy',
 He called Book 'Book Book'.

No doubt that song meant slightly more to the member of the audience who assured us at interval that his address was 'Book Book, via Gandy Gandy, Wagga Wagga', but, as a four part round, it beat book shucks on old gum trees by a long way. It had the Tramping Company theatre operating with the balanced enthusiasm that the audience put into it, and made such a roasting finale for Act I that it invariably upstaged Act II.

If one had to find a general fault with Tramping Company productions, and one has to look hard to find it, it would be that the audience does not always match the rigour and panache of the theatrical conception.

A thatch has here, a glazed eye there, a care in incident whose pertinence is, to use an O'Connell phrase, 'possibly less than excellent'. It can be explained partly by the limited population resources of a big country town, when you have cast all the very good, you miss pertinence have to start on the quite good, but the quality of the outcome can of the Tramping Company needs no explaining away.

In *The People Show Number One* and now *Miss Litchfield's Riverina Follies*, they have created a genre that is a perfect frame for their bushy anthropomorphies of talents, without demanding a dominating Barnard or a Carson to do it justice. They claim to be nothing more than the Greatest Show on Earth on its eternal provincial tour, yet they give more than one could hope for from any provincial touring company. It is the perfect compromise.



A strikingly well-made play GOING HOME

ROB ELLIS

Going Home by Alan de Groot. National Theatre, Lyttelton, Sydney. Opened 30 July 1977. Director, Richard Wherrett, designer, Ian Reissman. Art: Chris Haywood. Zoo: Catherine Willis. Mike: Gary Day. Molly: Nancy Hayes. Tom: James Elliott.

Although in some ways like *Down Under*, a life-study play by Anne Brookbank and me about expatriate Australians dragging that had once more had home to the "backwater" side of the world (where, we may be certain, their yellowing vision of a clean, well-lit place in which to be a true artist will still stand them once again), Alan de Groot's play, *Going Home*, also in three-act form, is in some ways a much better one — apart, as in that, simpler in its characterization and more addressing in its delineation of the understanding female who watches, time after time, her half-baked, overreaching husband blowing it.

The husband, Jim, (Chris Haywood) a sonobuile travel-sorcerer with steel sheen of what true art should be, is bravely laying up his modestly promising career as a painting teacher at a provincial university in snowbound Canada. He would prefer, on the whole, to be freed so he can go back to Australia where things, by definition, will be easier. Zoo, however, (Catherine Willis) has seen it all before — her husband's idealism, his irrational hope, his unfounded, bumptious belief that his art is progressing and all his colleagues feels of progress — and the bugger to contemplate leaving him.

Her apparently arrives at the form of her husband's old friend Mike (Debbie Gary Day), as childless, name-dropping, transvestite, pretentious, affectationist art careerist whose ridiculous changes, cockamamie and bad taste have got him important exhibitions in Europe and New York. His comic wife, Molly (Nancy Hayes), an overweight, retrograde Australian novelist of self-love and boy, marital misery through whose bed he several hairy chasers in New York.

Molly has come back to Canada in the half-hope of altering up her barren marriage to her's boss, Tom (James Elliott) after five months of absolute protracted round the pick-up bars of New York. Tom a gruff, nice, failed painter

from the working classes of Yorkhaven, a man mid-aged and very and excessively content with his minor place in the universe, works mostly back at a manner of terminal peak, but for his acquaintance demands from her such humiliating turns (like immediate sexual congress, now, upstairs in a stranger's house) that she rejects him again, but only for a time. Though full of sexual path, Zoo decides, too, to be on her way with Mike, when Mike, as is his way, has briefly changed his mind. So the painful vision goes unmet, and slowly and grimly, with as sad leaps of greater fable, the wanderers come home. They will, at least, approximate to now.

It's a strikingly well-made play, with a focus, atmosphere and structural polish that put me in mind of Samson Gray. The wit is ample and mellow and though interestingly apoplectic never plays a character false for the sake of a laugh. In all its aspects except perhaps that of vulgar energy I find it superior to *A Handful of Friends*, many of whose preoccupations it shares. In particular in its delineation of the choices open to an artist — crass, Early careerism, partial, manicose self-delusion and near-pedagogic withdrawal from the only time in the world worth running — it shows a mind of considerable multidirectional compassion. And its delineation of all the choices open to a woman is masterly. You can be either, she seems to be saying, a flabby bather at home or a pliant, waddling dame, but there is no middle way. At least not yet there isn't.

The production, by Richard Wherrett, was shapely and under and made of a second sort that could have been easily defining a small masterpiece of drunken irreverence, and the set, by Ian Reissman, bulky, wooden and commanding, a plateau to live in. From the always excellent performances I would, in one mood, pick James Elliott's lived-in, academic Yorkhavenian for the gravity and pace of his crooked shoulders and Nancy Hayes's chatty emotional declaim for the association with which the old round big-eyed shagging face in another mood Gary Day for the relish and music of his mouth-hatched word-compromising snarl and Catherine Willis for her deep, off-keyed mezzo. Chris Haywood, though one of my favourite actors, and in this case a bouncy and persistently rough-hewn of laughs, was best in her Cockney accent and could never quite wriggle off my unkindness. Clearly a classic evening of sorts, at least as good as *Down Under* (I hardly nearly acknowledge) and one well worth a revisit.

This is not a heavy play and could be entertaining

FANSHEN

JOHN McCALLUM

Fan-shen by Shao Hsueh. Directed, Dennis Downes; Setting, Sydney. Opened 27 August 1977.

Director, Michael Wherrett, designer, Dennis Downes; costume, Yvonne Foster; Hair dresser, Tim Barnes; Margaret Common, Mike Larkham, John Jay, Suzanne Parkinson, George Stutter, Bill Summons, Stephen Thomas.

Wouldn't it be nice if more plays were braindead, splitting, soliloquies, or mind-expanding experiences? If you could go to the theatre knowing that here the leading idea of the time were to be carried, and that you were about to learn something about people in the world and be imaginatively involved in something outside your experience? If we, as audience, were prepared actively and with open minds to respond to the situation of such a play and ensure that through our participation we leave the theatre wiser and enriched?

Fan-shen is potentially such a play. It deals with a human problem and a political process of which we have no experience in the West. The villagers of Long Bow, several hundred miles southeast of Peking, depend for their very survival on how quickly and efficiently they can come to terms with the political change which is reorganizing their lives.

It is not so much a political play as a play about politics itself — the relationship between the leaders and the led and the human effects of radical political change.

In the aftermath of the Japanese occupation, and in the middle of the Civil War between the Communists and the Nationalists, the villagers have to organize for themselves the "Fan-shen", or revolutionary upsurge, which will take them out of their feudal dependence on their landlords and turn them into good communists, working for themselves and controlling the distribution of resources in their own area.

The play makes the political plot they are given to do that and the problems they face as they discover that politics is complex.

The directions that are given the villagers by the Communists Party, and

which challenge all their former ideas of how to go about things, require for them a major effort of re-thinking. A similar effort, at least of imaginative involvement, is required of a company that performs the play, and of an audience that hopes to get something out of it.

David Hare's claim, in a note quoted in the programme, that the West, with its current political problems (of division between the people and their bureaucracy) has a lot to learn from the study of the political solutions set forth in the play. If this is so then the cast and audience need to work hard to involve themselves without pre-judgment in the socially difficult world.

The shape of the play helps. In a Brechtian fashion it presents issues in set scenes, each illustrating a particular development and each leading to a complex picture of the change in the village. Good Chinese Communists, the characters stop what they are doing for self-expression and re-evaluation.

The audience, who have been going along with the characters' actions, continuously find themselves inadvertently assuming grave political and professional errors, which the play only corrects. In a sense it is a teaching-play.

Why, then, is this production so unsatisfactory? Is it that we are so contaminated by the consciousness of our own status and the values of our society that we are incapable of thinking ourselves into the situation in *Long Bow*?

There is evidence of a great deal of work on the part of actors, in trying to understand the villagers' often digressive and world is so different.

But there still seems to be a great deal of Western thinking going on on stage. The antagonists between the villagers, the cadre organising them and the Work Team from the provincial centre are presented too often in terms of violent clashes of personality — clashes which no doubt existed but which readily the antagonist and confuse the political dimension of the play.

There is a obvious problem with such a piece as simply boring your audience without involving them at all, but I do not believe that the solution is to temper a bit of characterisation and obviously hope to sugar the pill.

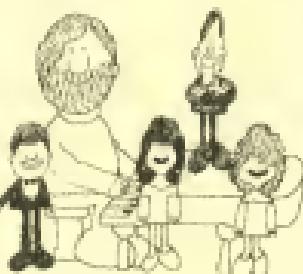
A play of political ideas need not be a better put at all. With commitment to the playtext, and clear, straightforward presentation, such a subject might stand on its own and interest audiences of whatever political persuasion.

A similar problem is that the whole mood of the play tends toward the catastrophic, at least as played at the National. There are good guys, except they keep turning into bad guys who send most good guys to fight them. An interest in where going to war is not of place in such a study of power. The outcome is in a way cynical, and unfriendly, as is depicted by the play. Although it ends with a splendid theatrical execution of the ideal

comedy: nowt's the peace is still going on in Long Bow.

It may seem that I am complaining about precisely those things that might make an otherwise heavy play entertaining. However this is not a heavy play, and could be entertaining. The production, lacking a clear driving purpose, did not bring it.

In the programme Richard Wherrett writes of how the research involved Asking Basic Questions and Self-Criticism, two aspects of the political play in *Long Bow* in the play. Useful though this undoubtedly is, it is a pity it didn't also produce the commitment and personal comedy that might have given this otherwise excellent production the additional power it needs.



The star is Sondheim

SIDE BY SIDE BY SONDEHEIM

BY WILLIAM SHOURBRIDGE

Side by Side by Sondheim by Stephen Sondheim. Theatre Royal, Sydney. Nowt. Opened 27 September 1977. Director, Ray Coombes. Set, John P. Murphy. Lighting, John Curnow. Music, Stephen Sondheim. Book, John Kander. Cast, John Lowe, Piaf, Dale Kingdom, Michael Blodaw.

Well, it took long enough to get here, but the initial post-curtain evening of the first songs of Stephen Sondheim has arrived at Sydney at last, and will travel on to Melbourne and Adelaide later.

I mean about a powerful literature and delight in Sondheim's lyrics. Over five years ago I presented my close friends only with the cast album (nearly unused) of Sondheim's *Company*, pointing out to them the exquisite apposite cleverness of his lyrics, tail as closely to the natural rhythms and inflections of the speaking voice:

Anyone who has ever heard "The Cell Block", "Leaving my Mind" or "Anyone can Whistle" cannot deny the unashamed strength and perming truthfulness

Yet, although Sondheim uses words as his whiz, music is his motor. He had a thorough grounding in strict musical composition, and while he himself will say he has no great gift as a melodic, he manages to put most to work, makes it speak with a parallel and comparable voice to whatever his lyrics are doing and saying.

Those who, like me, were fortunate enough to attend Sondheim's master class on lyric writing at the Minty Theatre Forum earlier this year will remember the concise and direct way in which he underlined what he thought a song should be and how it should be constructed. How songs shouldn't echo what the script has already said, how this should fit exact times, places, moods and characters. How there are two sorts of song, those that propel the storyline forward and those that elucidate an individual commentary on the action, delineating a personality, if you will.

There is ample evidence of his craft (a truly deserved but over-valuable and necessary strength) in *Side by Side by Sondheim*.

The trouble is that the show, being a pastiche, rigs the songs from their context, expects them to stand on their own ability as self-contained statements, and some of them cannot stand up to the scrutiny.

Sondheim also mentioned at the Forum the value of collective effort, a successful show is built on everyone connected with it starting from the beginning and working on everyone connected with it starting from the beginning and working in close co-operation. He mentioned the song "A Weekend in the Country" as a case in point. That song was written a month before the show opened, it needed the company/lyricist to set the characters and the set (Boris Aronoff's masterpiece of waltzing typewriter guides) before he could even start that momentous six parts of a song that illustrated whole layers of troubled relationships, jealousies, intrigues and personal fears. The result was a breathtaking triumph of deft wit, clever psychology and droll stagecraft.

Side by Side by Sondheim mostly sidesteps such examples and focuses its attention on the great ones from his shows, the big, deeply personal statements from *Follies*, *Anyone can Whistle*, *Company*, and *Night Must Fall* as well as a few show-stoppers from the above-mentioned and others such as *Company*, *The Mad Show*, and *Pacific Oceans*.

Others have said elsewhere and I'm going to trust that the present show suffers from the lack of an orchestra so that we cannot savour the songs couched in Jonathan Tunick's moist, querulous orchestrations that add so much to the way of numbers, tone and emotional colour.

But Sondheim's songs manage well enough with their piano accompaniment to better than all Sondheim songs at all and we can only be thankful that the pro-

doers have the courage to bring to Australia the work of a man whom most audiences have never heard of and who has never experienced his work at first hand. (The Little Night Music was mounted by J.C. Williamson's in a few years back, but that's another story.)

Only one song of Sandham's has impacted on the general consciousness here in Australia and that of course is "Send in the Clowns" from *Night Must Fall*. A haunting melody now listed to being mangled by almost every aspiring cabaretist in the country.

So what's the big downside here in Australia? Well, there's Jill Perryman, a familiar and much loved stalwart of the Williamson's of yore, there's the above song, and, for Sydney, there's... John Lunn.

Lunn, heavy handed commentary peppered with stale jokes and florid attempts at topical satire, themselves,归来 to blight the evening greatly. Neil Sherrin, the narrator for the London cast in a natural unaffected set, Lunn is not, let's leave it at that. Neil Ferrer taking over the narration for the matinee inexplicably, but still not much of an improvement.

But what of the songs? I hear you muttering in desperation. Jill Perryman is a good singer, and a considerable comedienne, but here and there she gives in for some unlistenable fun going, enough to make Jerry Lewis look like a master of understatement. In fact a degree of ragged Laugher-clownishness seems to seep into the show a little too often for my taste. Things like that are a world away from what Sandham's songs are about.

Sandham is erudite and eloquent, his characters are volatile, incisive and edge (or at least they have been to date, God knows when they'll be in musicals to come). The Australian cast, too patric and British-tight seems, perhaps, didn't seem to have that personal shot patina that made the songs spring to life and remain believable.

Both Perryman and her female castmates likewise are good at presenting the physical, acting side of a song, but in voice they were sited, the less colour, widening character (or rather attitude changes within a song) did not come to the surface.

There were exceptions of course, mainly towards the end of the evening when the audience and the stage had warmed up somewhat. Perryman's rendition of "You Shall Hear" from *Faille* built up from the wimpy-to-hard bitten despair to radiant triumph (albeit with a catch in the throat) and had the audience on its feet. Yet even here it could not completely eradicate the memory of hearing Carol Rose sing the same song.

Carroll Rose had an unnerving tendency to follow and check at moments of stress, and a shift towards fineness when she was trying to be brash. Yet here again, this lady singing the slowed-down heart-wrenching version of "Broadway Baby" was quite superb.

One person who worked so hard and was largely ignored by the daily press was the solo tenor of the evening, Bartholomew John. Given continual support concerned only with elucidating the words and music of Sandham, he was, as far as it was concerned the sole, secure base for the whole show.

His only drawback was a lack of delivery, a certain loss of differentiation that made him seem oddly monochromatic in both voice and character, one example being his rendition of the title song from the ill-fated *Empress of Bleakly*. This song is a self contained laying bare of personal shortcomings, a confession, yet one that requires help. John didn't catch those subtle gradations within the lyrics and the song fell flat accordingly.

It was clear, as I have said, on the face of the songs being born from their context, of the sombre lyrics of a French/Sondheimian song being unpacked. It was also clear to the direction.

The stage was filled with business, little of it to any point. The longer logic and growth of nearly every song went the route. If only Sandham could have made a over as was logical, he could have conducted the the team through the rapids, guided them into a deeper awareness of each situation and character, he might have even been able to make the narrator and his narration more supportive than it was or wasn't.

And yet, and yet, I wouldn't have missed it for the world and I sang out happy and delighted despite my misgivings. It was not an evening of total analytical joy as you can see, but perhaps if one looks beyond the process of this current cast towards the product of Sandham's expressive ability, one will be consistently delighted, amazed, and appreciative of one of the most innovative, infectious, and experimental talents in the theatre today.

'Jack has a passion and a purpose which is refreshing'

JACK

JOHN McNEIL LUM

Jack by Jim McNeil. Neutral Theatre, Upstairs, Sydney Opera. 17 September 1977.

Director, Ken Hester, designer, Lanny Eastwood, music composed by Robert Murphy.

Tom, John Clapham Jack, Martin Morris Warden, Malcolm Keith doctor, Barbara Bewes

Jim McNeil has spent more than half his adult life in prison, been broken by sadness and felt the debilitationary effects of prison life. *Jack* is his first play written outside, and it is bitters and passageway about the

destructiveness of the prison system.

In it we are led progressively down through a series of prison cells to the hell of the maximum security section at Grafton, N.S.W. (A ripple through the audience when Grafton was first mentioned on the night I was there testifies either to the pathology the place has had instilled, or to McNeil's ability to set up his hell.)

Unfortunately for Jack in the play his Virgil is Oscar Wilde and his Beatrice a photo bag filled with warm water — not enough to bring him through to salvation. He never rises from the cell at Grafton.

Jack falls into two separate halves. The first act is a straightforward and naturalistic series of scenes between Jack and his estranged Tom. It looks backwards from prison to the real world, as Jack explains to Tom that without someone to love, you are less human, and without the gently nurturing influence of women, men are incomptent — animals.

The act is slow, sometimes awkward and almost embarrassingly personal. Jack is not satisfied with the compensation of his mate Tom, and makes a surrogate friend — the photo bag — who represents his Much-harried woman outside and to whom, as to which, he talks.

The act closes as Tom, who has killed the photo bag to show Jack that it's not real, goes flightless of his violent reaction and walks a warfar.

The second act is a complete break from all that. Jack is now in the Observation Section at Long Bay Gaol and the real world is left far behind. The impersonal, functional world of the first half becomes a frightening naked, directly addressing the audience, beating up Jack and setting with the Doctor (he with his baton, she with her drags) to force Jack further on his road to Grafton.

With the sort of avoidance with which Hochhauser brings Auschwitz on stage in the final act of *The Representative* the naturalism of the first half is dropped.

Where human interaction is not allowed the emblematic dramatic simplicity of character is available. From the creature of the world at the beginning this act looks forward to Jack's inevitable destruction.

The duplicit structure of this play, it has been claimed, interferes with concentrated focus of dramatic unity. At interval the expectation is that the play will continue in the same vein to explore the relationship between Jack and Tom.

Tom's total disappearance in the second half, however, and his replacement by the warden and the doctor, ironically highlights Jack's loneliness. It is precisely by going against the expectation of the audience for the second half that Jack achieves its galvanic power.

The play, at least in this production, seems of anything else turned in pushing the progression to its conclusion. Ken Hester appears to have backed away from the second half, so that some of its scenes don't settle easily as many and are

interesting, passionate outbursts suitable for the soapbox rather than the theatre.

Also the character of the female doctor, who is half sympathetic and half oppressive, contains the weaker argument about the sexes needing each other to be complete human. In her easier alliance with the weaker she makes Jack's otherwise nearly perfect relationship with his pliant but look pathetically magnified, by taking away any participation within the play for the barge of women.

Without doing so suggest that Jim McNeil rewrite his play I suspect the effect would be closer of that evangelist almost wags himself. As all such can would determine the mood of the whole play.

This play shows more clearly than any number of pieces of recuperative pretension what it's like to live in prison and feel your personality being taken away. I was going to write that the rather clumsy attempt to contrast the audience with its own responsibility was unnecessary, and certainly some members felt alienated and resentful of being allowed:

I'm going to go home.

There is a feeling of indulgence in the mind of treacherous therapist towards playwrights who are black, or female, or ex-prisoners. I don't know how Jim McNeil feels about having his suffering and his personal commitment explored by them, but I can sympathise with his trying to ensure that some political good will come out of it.

Certainly the cast do not look sympathetic and commanding. John Clayton and Marianne Hansen, old hands at the sort of thing, not with great sensitivity. Malcolm Keir captures the manic energy of the seedy self and an impotent at one of the previous suggests his part of a sadistic master is of anything too frightening. I have said that I find the doctor and of place, but that is hardly Barbara Denner's fault.

Jack has a passion and a purpose which is refreshing after some other things at the Sydney at the moment, and I don't much care if Jim McNeil never polishes up his style. I just hope theatres don't try to polish it up for him. I eagerly await from him, for next year perhaps, the production of a play by a while

Away Match is a mildly diverting, commercially-oriented piece whose principal theme, as reflected in the title, are marital infidelity served as an indictment and an attempt to give up smoking. The central character has been dominated by his wife throughout twelve years of marriage (it is generally agreed among the characters that she is a "spicy bitch") and during the action of the play he manages to give up smoking and liberate himself from her by making love to the wife of his best friend.

Despite the fact that his own wife now realises that she loves and needs him, the central character maintains his independence at the end and it looks as if they're going to part. Actually, at curtain, (no curtain fall but one for the costumiers), it turns out that they're not going to part but that she's going to let him wear the pants (She has, I think, worn pants throughout the play).

One's interest is held by the question of whether the central character will step from a pretty incompetent mouse and become a masterful one man. And, as I say, he does. A marginal question is whether the wife of the best friend will reject the "arrangement" she has with her "loving" husband and return to her man with her hero (she doesn't). So finally the integrity of the two marriages is maintained — our hero's being regenerated and his best friend's continuing as its cheerfully unregenerate Hoff.

I'm at a loss for critics on this sort of play. I guess it could be said to be successful if one accepts the characters as being in some way real or well observed, or if one can somehow identify with their problems. If this is the case I must admit that I don't know anyone like Tony, Errol, Lucy and Michael.

That, of course, is not to say that there may not be just such chapter at weekends dotted all over the land of Shaggy (where the play is set) and elsewhere. On

the other hand, although I couldn't honestly say I found much to identify with in their situation, I did develop a sort of theoretical interest in them and a certain curiosity as to what sort of life their owners would conceive for them.

The play is largely, in form, a comedy and another criticism might be the degree of racism that the playwright has in making the characters spring to life in vocal comic dialogue and situations — one thinks of the plays of Samson Gray and Neil Simon as examples of that ability. Well, I may have seen a rather flat performance — a Tuesday night with a small audience — but I found the dialogue rather rapid and florid, a sort of bland white noise of jokes, and the scenes were either less than vivid.

It has taken me a while to remember any examples of the comedy but here are two as a visual gag the hero's incompetence is illustrated by an attempt to clamp the handle he is passing back on to an antique candle by wedging it between the top of a ladder and the underside of a boat suspended from the ceiling. The suspense of the idea, the inevitability of its failure seemed to me to over-stretch the character's credibility at this point, without significant gain in the way of a riotously funny situation.

And, as an example of the dialogue comedy, the aforementioned boat which has been built inside the cottage by our hero and which is too large to be got outside with any ease, is treated as a sexual symbol and measured about "Taking it out", "pounding it a bit", "having how it will stand up" etc. And the play ends with the hero standing up in it while his wife waits for him to be ready to launch it in his own good time.

The comedy, in short, gives me the impression of having been added to the character material as a conventional adjunct designed to render it palatable and familiar.

I thought Tom Oliver was really very good as the hero — the bawdy cutaway, the self-conscious incompetence and defensive weakness looking you a little pathetic in the mature man and shooting early into the euphoria of new found confidence. Sam Walker played his wife and didn't seem to be very comfortable in the part (directly I didn't think they suited her, and it's a pretty unattractive character).

Lynne Ralston played the best friend's wife to good purpose, making one quite hope she would leave her sexist husband. Vicent Hall played her cold husband in a very cynical, Wise Old Man of way Writing about the characters and the performances so if they were somehow interchangeable makes me aware that I am looking at them in either the way people look at favourites in a soap opera.

All in all, it's the sort of play which might once have dragged its audience all the way into town to see it presented by Willoughmores — Marlowe 34 certainly brings it much closer to home.

Tom Oliver was really very good as the hero

AWAY MATCH

RITA CRAMPHORN

Away Match by Peter Yeldham and Maggie Woods. Marlowe 34, Theatre Royal, NSW. Opened 1 September 1977.
Director, Michael Durran, designer, Ross Mackay, stage manager, Frances Taylor.
Tony Piper, Tom Oliver, Lynne Ralston, Sam Walker, Lucy Durran, Lynne Ralston, Michael Durran, Vicent Hall.



Tom Oliver Photo Peter Hoddie



Margot Kidder (right) as Rosalie, Margaret Ford (left), Dorothy Querterton (center) and John A. Hill (far right) in *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* at the Old Town's The Zone. Photo: Robert McFarlane

Are wit, style and pace too much to ask for?

THE TIME IS NOT YET RIPE

DOROTHY HEWITT

The Time Is Not Yet Ripe by Louis Untermeyer. Old Town Theatre Company, Drama Theatre, Sydney NSW. Opened 1 September 1977. Director, Peter Colquhoun; designer, Anne Evans.

Stars: Helen Morgan, Sydney Buxton, Ned Parfett, Miss Perkins, Jean Batten, Sir Joseph Querterton, Kit Hutton, Sir Harry Pollock, Peter Colquhoun, John A. Hill, Al Thomas, Lady Pollock, Margaret Ford, Rosalie, Barbara Swanson, Roger Redfern, Michael Phillips, Dora, Roger Curran, Harry Hopkins, Karen Lester, Peter Tissot, Rod Phillips, Arthur Grey, Richard Collins, Andréi Franklin, Julian Firth, a fat man, Tom Fury, a strong youth, Greg Bupper, a working woman, Maggie Kidderquist, an old man, Tex Blalock.

Louis Untermeyer's The Time Is Not Yet Ripe at the Opera House, a form about politics in Edwardian Melbourne, should fly and sparkle, be witty, elegant and popular.

How come then that the Old Town production lay so heavily on the imagination or met padding?

A play? It would have been delightful to prove that early Batten play, because the text deserves praise, and it has been neglected for far too long.

It is true that the women did infinitely better than most of the men. Helen Morgan, at the witty and endearing social butterfly, Dorothy Querterton, who stands for Puritanism on a "Pavilion of Light" platform, looked enchanting, was dressed to kill, and seemed to know what style was about.

But Ned Parfett was Esson's obstinate mouthpiece, Barbara Swanson, a vacuous Rhodes scholar and wealthy pensioner, just back from Oxford, seemed lost.

dashing about the stage in an irritable Batten's can do, marvellous things, but this was not one of them.

Perth actress, Margaret Ford, OBE, a brilliant lady, did an eighteenth century comedy of manners as Lady Pollock, which was pretty close to the mark, Jeanne Fine, an actress to watch, was as vicious Visier Pollock BA, LLB, a blustering "big woman" with shades of Major Barbara, Ann Evans, forced for too long at the amateurish slant of Cedric Moore, did a workmanlike Miss Perkins all the Anti-Socialist League, and one of my favourite Sydney actors, Robin Waring has an uncanny instinct that told her he was playing a mixture of Wilde and Shaw.

Dr Philip Parsons in his introduction to the Centenary National Theatre publication of *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe* in 1973, describes the play as "Wilde and Shaw entwined" in the elegant Prime Minister's drawing room, it is all Wilde, in the smoking club, the nicely matched Miss Querterton's committee room, and the street corner political rally, it is all pure Shaw.

The political rally was the most successful scene at the Opera House, due partly to its own dramatic ingenuity, (vintage car on stage, heckling crowd, Edwardian street scenes) but also to the delightful set and the nicely aesthetic "group".

What was lacking was that sense of an overall style and pace in the direction, so that every actor would fit into the quite intricate plan of the piece, every actor would know where he or she was, and what role they were playing. There was a sense that everyone was sitting it up as they went along, sometimes having the moment, but more often than not playing just off-stage.

The pace changed gear alarmingly, slowing down to a dead march, speeding up to manic proportions. It was as if the actors themselves, aware that something was wrong, were trying to push the pace along.

It should need no passing. Apart from anything else, it is still challengingly topical. The Liberal PM (or Australian Liberal, as always, read Tony) makes speeches extraordinarily like Mr Fraser on the big dredging questions, although Esson's PM is more laconic, the American bourgeoisie, John K. Hall, who wants to Americanise Australia by cutting back-on-her and making Chinese coffee from our tropical pine forests, because there is an untrained monkey and the Liberals' selling and themselves to sell him the country are all still with us.

Doris Querterton's "We are all keenly interested in politics. It's the best thing" is a prefiguring of Patrick White's treaty Mag in *The Day After*, going off to her amateur rally for the Labor Party.

One would imagine that a play which was, in Dr Parsons' words, "quite clearly written for the well-heeled folk of Toorak village" and using an already "established range of formal and stylised conventions", would still be relevant for the well-heeled folk of the city of Sydney, particularly an Opera House audience, and that the elegant and expensive professionalism which the play always needed, would be possible on an Old Town subsidy.

There seemed to be no true understanding on the production of the Batten character and philosophy. It's true that she is quite complex. Esson is not presenting us with a "real" left-wing politician, but with a true, Shawian社atethropologist. An intellectual who demands that everyone live their lives to the fullness stretch of their imaginations, a sub-thumper, a disturber of the peace an over-reacher, who is absurd and boasting and human and likable and therefore can never make a politician.

Like all Utopians who lose the essence in theory, he can't stand them in practice, but he is not just a political farcepot. He is as real as the new Jim Cairns, but then equally an Australian needs to understand Jim Cairns' intentions rather.

This is the third production of *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*. The first one was by the Melbourne Repertory Theatre in 1962, (in the presence of the Prime Minister Andrew Fisher) but although the play was controversially acclaimed and "highly successful" it did not receive into the commercial theatre.

The second production was at the Union Theatre, Melbourne in 1971, with Esson's grand-daughter, Esther Esson, playing Dora. The production was mounted by the Tenny College and Janet Clarke Hall Drama Club.

Wit, style, and pace, some glimmering of historical sense, rarely these are not too much to ask from one of the two major professional companies in Australia, but we seldom get them. It is a failure of nerve, a lack of theatrical intelligence, or just the dimness of an over-subsidized monopoly, not voluntary at all?

As Dora says, with her admirable candour, as the crowd cheers on the other side of the PM's plenty drawing room, "the best is yet to come".



Robin Ramsay in *Henry Lawson* at the Melbourne Theatre Company's production of *The Bardon* from the Bush and Other Stories.

Photo: David Parker

Henry Lawson is alive and well in Melbourne — twice

HENRY LAWSON

JOHN LARKIN

While The Bells Roar, based on Henry Lawson's writings, by Leonard Teale, Great Street Theatre, South Melbourne, Opened 1 September 1977
Director, Leonard Teale, design, Ian McPherson, lighting, Tony Morris, Lawyer, Leonard Teale

The Bardon From The Bush And Other Stories, directed by Robin Ramsay from the writings of Henry Lawson, compiled and adapted by Robin Ramsay and Rodney Fisher, Melbourne Theatre Company, at Russell Street Theatre, Melbourne, Opened 29 September 1977
Director, Rodney Fisher, design, Tony Tripp, lighting, Jamie Lewis, Lawyer, Robin Ramsay

This is the year of Henry Lawson again — at least, at last, anyway, in Melbourne, where we have been blessed by two almost simultaneous presentations of the man.

First in was Leonard Teale, with his *While The Bells Roar*, which he has staged at the Great Street Theatre in South Melbourne. He was only a few weeks before a season at the Russell Street Theatre for the Melbourne Theatre Company by Robin Ramsay of *The Bardon From The Bush And Other Stories*.

But there has been little obvious sense of competition between the two productions, for all the apparent consciousness of their timing.

If anything, they have probably complemented each other, first by all of a sudden drawing all that attention to one of the first (and last) great Australian authors — for Lawson was a loss, you bet — and second because each operates in quite different dimensions, so that attending both was necessary to know as much as we can about him.

Not far from top of that awful banana of bush productions claiming to have the real Lawson, and, indeed, doing that might have been a problem because if one thing is

clear from his confused life, it is that he was many people.

The only other reason to hold the two shows up side by side is to say the Ramsay night was much more refined, not in the sense of being gentle (for Lawson was never that, but in the way of being a better distillation of the liquid, holding not mere depth and breadth of both information about his myth and the Lawson's interior.

Both men perform solo and both, quite characteristically, four different types of embroidery to Lawson.

The Teale programme consists of a night in some hall at the turn of the century in which Lawson extenuates his audience in his eternal search for money — the man was invariably poor — by readings and lots and lots of being himself.

Teale's magnificence rises rises and falls in amongst the gotted points as a guide to the many moods of the man, as well as his great sense of looking for the land around him, his being such an involved witness when much of Australia's attention was still being diverted away from itself.

Lawson would suffer from this trend. While he longed to be taken seriously intellectually, his country was still being imagined, represented by the ends of Europe

Lawson becomes, possibly for the wrong reasons, the captive and he turns out for his love money. This, along with his alcohol problem, his financial problems, his money problems, his women problems, and his personality problems, frustrates him.

Tom uses much of his time to open up the past, but in between, there are glimpses of Lawson himself having Tom, on an edge of anxiety about the coming which makes us wonder whether Lawson has a secret, seems having to perform that his dog for his master, is halfway to getting drunk, again, or is it just playfully, or all of these, all at once?

Added by such devices as strong very hard at individual members of the audience, and, on occasion, making an changes with them, Tom has our attention all the way through, even when he does away the end of the night by having Lawson break down when talking about losts and have to be helped off stage by an usherette. It was a mistake, but not bad enough to take away the joke of the silly nature of Tom's ways.

On the other hand, the Ramsay night is an experience more for the mind. It might have been, then, more to Lawson's liking taking time and space to look for the lesser known outer layers of his work and inner layers of himself.

Ramsay spent much time in the Mitchell Library in Sydney researching the Lawson writings, then he wrote his script, which he and Rodney Fisher then compiled and adapted together.

It should not be assumed that because Ramsay gets more Lawson his night will be some sort of mono-depressive excursion in which memory has located a gentle field.

We are made much aware of Lawson's awful isolation, both real and imagined, from his country and its people, in his eternal search for somewhere to be his friend, but finding it not in the city, not in the bush, no overseas, and no place within himself.

Yet, apart from his always being up against it — or perhaps, partly because of it — Lawson, through Ramsay, a most sensitive medium and imagination manage to more than cope with Lawson's mood, never losing his sense of fun or fun.

Indeed, much of the evening is bawdy, a drill, down at the mouth-hair-paste-barbers, look at life back in Sydney, and all the way back to the city of Sydney and the audience, according to him, offspring of London.

Rodney Ramsay's great talent for being many characters meets the needs of all the people in the Lawson stories and even on plays of them, so we are constantly aware of a stage harmonising and bubbling and linking with the intensity of the Lawson perceptions.

More of all, though, we sense Lawson's loneliness, his trying to come to terms with being himself. In both these aspects, he was a far and fine reflection of Australia itself. Through Ramsay, this has been born.



My Fair Lady without the songs

PYGMALION

RAYMOND STANLEY

Peynmalion, by George Bernard Shaw
Melbourne Theatre Company presentation at
Athenaeum Theatre, Melbourne, Victoria
Opened 15 September 1977. Director, Ray
Stanley, designer, Hugh Colman.

Cast: Elizabeth Hill, Sally Cudlipp, Mrs
Evelyn Hall, Jacqueline Collier, Freddie
Lyall and Bill, Gary Birrell, Alan Baddeley,
Sandy Gore, Colleen Polkinghorne, Alison Collyer,
Henry Higgins, Franklin Parsons, Coal
Sexton, Miss Rosalie, Mrs Pearce, Mrs
Higgins, Alastair Doolittle, Edward Higgins, Miss
Higgins, Mary Ward, Miss Higgins, Justice
Priest, Captain Kangaroo, Captain Horrell, A
Frenchwoman, Dorothy Phillips, French Boy
Builders, Lydia, Mrs Higgins, Sally Cudlipp,
Hoskin, Miss Clara, Other Extras, Production
of Scene 1: Peter Cane, Robert Horwell, Miss
Clara.

George Bernard Shaw wrote *Peynmalion* in 1912 especially for actress Mrs Patrick Campbell who, after many tribulations, played the role of Eliza Doolittle at the age of 49 in the first English production in 1914, and was still performing the role in other productions up until 1930. Only Shaw's refusal presented her leaving the play later. When the film was made in 1938 Mrs Campbell was approached to play Miss Higgins, but declined, which, for history's sake, was a great pity.

Peynmalion was the first play by Shaw to really make money, and has continued to do so ever since. It is much more of a "postbox" than any of his other. Considerably or not, its plot is very similar to (as indeed in Shaw's own novel *Pygmalion*, which Shaw admitted having read in a youth).

Apart from the well publicised rehearsal rows between Mrs Pat, her leading man astrologer 61-year-old Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree, and Shaw who despised the public, in 1914 were shared before hand by press reports that Mrs Pat, during the course of the play, would speak a forbidden word which could not possibly be printed.

It is not so much the years, however, and the patriarchal age, which have taken the word, as to speak, out of *Peynmalion*. It is that 1938 musical based on the play, *My Fair Lady*. To see *Peynmalion* today makes one realise what a brilliant job Kierke and

Low did, and one respects the performers — or Higgins at least — to have the sang whenever some of the musical's lead-up dialogue is spoken.

And what about that word itself — "bloody"? That first audience graced it with uncontrollable laughter, timed by somebody present at 75 seconds? And a crucial much comment later amongst the clergy and other upper boites? Low and Kierke updated it to "more per bloomers", which was necessary during the '30s. Only a massive fast-talker would suffice today — and even then the impact would hardly equal 1914's "bloody".

Ray Lester, directing the play for the Melbourne Theatre Company, has used much of Shaw's printed script for the 1978 screen version, which is quite a good idea. It brings in new characters and words and fits in the action, made possible by use of a revolving stage. Has this version been used before for the stage, I wonder? Certainly the recording of the play which the Radegaves made incorporates it.

If not too much "Topsy" (missus) is introduced into the proceedings, Shaw will almost always play well and succeed at that level, and with *Peynmalion* the roles are pretty well actor-proof. When JCW presented *My Fair Lady* John McCullum used to insist anyone could play Eliza, and proved it again and again with unknown Haymer odds flying from the chair substituting for along-lasting talent.

So quite naturally the MTC do a competent job most of the time. Sandy Gore and Franklin Parsons are fine and experienced performers, and especially fit out the parts of Eliza and Higgins. The Polkinghorne Sisters though a far too youthful, and indeed seem younger than Higgins, when it should be the reverse. As always with both the straight and musical versions though, it is really Doolittle (this time Edward Higgins) who walks off with the evening's honour.

I feel personally that, for a company of the MTC's ability, some of the smaller parts playing could have been better accomplished. Mrs Pearce was fairly vocal and Mrs Higgins appeared to be playing — on first sight at least — in a different style from the rest of the cast. Her performance was brought out of a vacuous amateur play.

May be actress Mary Ward was right in this approach, and the others wrong in approaching the play as a classic. For *Peynmalion* is Shaw's most commercial play. So, why should the MTC be staging it when one of the company's declared aims is "to provide for the production, representation and performance of theatrical entertainments which are not generally offered to the public by commercial management". There are so many other Shaw plays Australia — and Melbourne — still has never seen.

Partly traditional costume and gold set designs from Hugh Colman. For one of the sets had been so constructed that a girl was left at one side of the stage — or was that the fault of the revolving?



Maurice Rispin and Karen Perlman

Where the hell is Camberley?

THE BRASS HAT

RICHARD POTHERINGHAM

The Brass Hat by Thomas Meehan
Queensland Theatre Company, S Q T Q
Theatre, Brisbane Qld Opened 24 August 1977
Directed, Robin Lupton; designs, James
Edwards; stage manager, David Grimes;
lighting designer, Rob Mackay-Scobie
Lt Col Guy Holden, Alan Edwards, Cleo
Mavroki, Barbara, Major George Bradby,
Russell Newman, Princess Ida Brown, Douglas
Hodge, Major General Charles Anderson,
Gret, Kim Hartnett

The QTC, having offered us four English plays out of five at the SQTQ this year (Woolfenden was the lone Aussie) is now

heading to the end of the year with four more — Meehan's *Brass Hat*, Guy's *Otherwise Engaged*, Ayckbourn's *Confessions*, and a country man of the biblical *Why Hasn't God Job a Donkey?*

How a small company can possibly throw this lot in (or *The Sound of Music* or *Death of a Salesman*) boggles me, and though the present strong young company will probably ensure good productions of all four, I'm also beginning to grow weary of the English, their dogmatic preoccupation with their declining self-image, and the irritating assumption that the behavior of people on a small island with very different historical and cultural traditions from ours is a satisfactory image of how we think and behave.

Robin Lupton's chapter's note in the programme for *The Brass Hat* offered the usual banal rubbish about how the play's background — the breaking up of a manor of a pre-communist village by

the British Army in Malaya — is "relevant" to its theme of social violence.

If an American wrote "The Home Life of Louis Wilson Colley", would the Mt Isa miners really be interested in that play? And if Colley had driven one of his wandering soldiers in suicide in an attempt to back up the massacre, would we really describe that as "a human tragedy" (the words the author uses to describe the smaller plot of *The Brass Hat*)?

And could our imaginary American author really get through two hours of dialogue without even querying whether the Americans should have been in South East Asia at all, as the *Brass Hat* author manages to do for the British?

There's a world of difference, to use another analogy, between showing the terrible problems of the Auschwitz Commandant, who has been told to kill 100,000 Jews and only has got for \$10,000, and showing that the same nice

comendant is really a bastard at best who's even capable of cold-bloodedly killing his constant murderer. The *Brave New*, in short, is a limp apology for imperialistic arrogance and mass murder, and whatever its self-praising (one couldn't say laudatory) value for the British, it has no place on an Australian stage.

On a more trivial level the *Notes on the Scene* — "The Living Room of the Holden's married quartet in the Canterbury area... in the present time" — is a classic example of the stultifying survivalism our state companies of the 1960s and 1970s insisted the centre of the world.

Where the hell is Canterbury? (I now quote from an atlas that is the now armed Sandhurst Military Academy southwest of London). In the present time? Events in Malaysia have undergone many major changes since the post-war world war two events which lie behind the play.

Somehow should this be an elementary course in recent Australian history for the benefit of our dearth companies and play selection. The Cheltenham parliament supported (well, technically I'd prefer) the colonialist movements in Indonesia and South East Asia, and even during the Malayan/Jacobian confrontation when English and Australian troops were both stationed in Malaya, the conservative Minerals Committee, through Sir Gifford Pinchot, cast a slur to the effect that English and Australian interests in South East Asia were very different.

The assumptions of Australians are not those which lie behind *The Brave New*, and those who would like our theatres to be little corners of a foreign field that are forever England need to be confronted with a few hard facts.

It's a pity I suppose to have to be so critical of a good production well acted. Ron Haddrick's presence gives an extra boost to the play, and Douglas Hodge (who showed us in *St Joan* that he was capable of vocal tones other than the usual mumble which is his stock in trade) displayed an emotional range and maturity which made this his best performance to date, but there's not much we admire the show as a rolling apple.

We've got to stop extorting up the blind allegiances of the minor English playwrights.

Shaw and Shakespeare are one thing, David Rabe and Anthony Shaffer, Thomas Mischamp and Simon Gray are quite another and we've got to keep kicking this absurd proliferation of several dozen relevance till at stage building.

My lovey is his side again: "Is the emotional violence of social estrangement, or auto-eroticised inter-personal relationships, any less than that of machine guns, letter bombs, or the flow of blood?"

Perhaps not, from the point of view of actors who spend their social time bickering about show dogs, but from almost any other, you, Mr Lampay, it is.

professional, was making no attempt to do things well, and wasn't interested in making money.

Which was a pity, for there were some good acting performances, and the play itself all right. Years after regular professional theatre came to Brisbane, we finally got a production of a play by arguably our greatest playwright, and *The Seagull or Sarapapilla* is arguably his greatest play. It should have been the gleaming peak of our theatrical year. It's also the last production by John Whalley in artistic director of Twelfth Night Theatre after at least twenty years of consistent achievement there. We should have been packed in the seats and cheering.

Instead there was perhaps a third of a house that scattered. The lady on my left had never been to a play before, but shed come because she'd met the people in the cast and at Harbour at the Four Aces Airport in the Gardens on Monday night, and since they were Twelfth Night subscribers and evidently had similar tastes, she'd tagged along to that as well. She got very restless during the second half.

Since Twelfth Night has obviously set out to create a popular and profitable musical comedy house style, among their artistic scruples with Patrick White done on the cheap (except for 16 actor salaries) is bound to be diametrically disapproving and financially disastrous.

And yet on spite of everything for me at least it was great just to see the play. So much recent Australian theatre consists of hasty scripts propped up by fine actors and courageous directors, and here was a masterly script with some strong central acting performances. The musical rhythm of the dialogue was sheer pleasure, and the punny dialogue when it gets into the unforgettable.

This production is correctly set in 1961, the year it was penned, and it's exciting to see that time has aged but not destroyed a Australian society that has entered an age of Violence a predatory just as the British were occupying them, and we've only just followed them into some semblance of hope.

In fact the male lead on the female breast was automatically assumed from birth, and was unheard of on stage. Patrick White's hard, direct, and relentless parade of sexuality and of human responses to it — the barren phallicism Nola Royle, the prudish and disengaged Gerda Pagan, the co-operative Miles Krebs, the obscenity of Pippy — must have hit the audience of sixteen years ago much better than their Gerda Pagan eyes. We may be more blind, but we haven't as much from such dimensions of behaviour, and White's subversiveness merely has altered and grown. Gerda Pagan learnt to make rules out of almost nothing, while his taught us that we can make masterpiece out of a vulgar wasteland. It was merely a pity that Twelfth Night served us this chief's spirituality on crooked and dirty chairs.

The production was saved by the play

THE SEASON AT SARSAPARILLA

RICHARD FOTHERINGHAM

The Seagull or Sarapapilla by Patrick White. Twelfth Night Theatre, Brisbane, Qld. Opened 23 September 1977. Director, Jean Whalley, designer, Jennifer Constantine, stage manager, Paul Colling, Gaylene Pagan (Pippy), Michelle Goh, Jane Hamilton, Gerda Pagan, Jane Wilson, Deedee, Sally Wilson, Harry Krebs, Lee Evans, Nola Royle, Rosalie May Smith, Clive Pagan, David Chillingworth, Merrin Scott, Steven Ross, Judy Pagan, Lee Burns, Lucy Child, Peter Rossini, Ross Suddards, Geoffrey Williams, John Sherrin, Ed Edes, Bruce Boyle, Mark Glynnson, Mr Erbige, Ray Cammer, Buckley Hanson, Tim Hughes. In translation was, Richard Christensen. Delightful music, Eddie Costabile.

I cast my professional teeth as a performing arts manager, and the old cliché (which theatrical executives stretched back into the sixteenth century London stage) satisfied me in this modern theatre in the art of making the cheap look expensive. Ah happy days! The things I could do with a yard of taffeta. And the programmes! Major number two. You can always make money on the programmes.

So my first impressions of the production of Patrick White's *The Seagull or Sarapapilla* at Twelfth Night Theatre were of such mass impersonality. The programme was a reduced sheet, and the art looked as if the usual budget was stretching, which it probably was. The curtains were a broad silk at 1822-1965, with about six or seven dress lengths and four heights. That last actress, Kate Wilson was dressed in a cool dressing gown. Everyone seemed like the grown-up daughter who emerged beneath her, and only a well sustained performance saved her from the cheap girl group.

The wigs looked as if they'd been thrown in the caravans and scattered for produce batches by the Sarapapilla dog pack, and the lighting — particularly the down and dusk cyclorama wash — was basic crude.

The aesthetic use of course (a perfect cheap and looks good device) was thoroughly executed, with gaps opening different ways in different places and doors frequently not opened at all. All in all you could hardly consider this production for one by a company that wasn't

Playscript:

JACK



Jim McNeil

JACK



The play is set made various NEW goals a
cell at Parramatta, the "Ole" action at
Long Bay & finally at the maximum
security goal at Goulburn

ACT ONE

Two men in a cell, each with his own
thoughts the wall radio playing a lone
song. Tom gets up and stretches off. Jack
looks at him.

Tom Didn't want that, did you?

Jack No. Thought you did.

Tom No. All that love she

Jack None of it here.

Tom They don't want us to get any either
Jack I don't wanna get it, I wanna be it you
before I go back real

Tom (He's back at me thought)

Jack Not that affection, y know?
(Tom a recent girlfriend) Well
I know to give some locker affection to
somebody? To touch, naffy sometimes
her, smile at 'em, do something go from
me to them y know?

Pause

Tom No. I have the counts. The lot, upper
and lower both. Only difference I dig give you
is with a flame-thrower.

Jack Well that's how I started to feel,
too? And I don't wanna?

Tom Can't avoid it
Jack, I wanna kill it not avoid it

Tom There's a few hundred more in this

year... you'll have some kills to do.

Jack I didn't mean that

Tom You know what you mean

Jack No... no it's past me

Tom Jack is downnow

Tom Ah look back, I been through that
shit... weird things wanna like they are
things and people and me with me, but
given it a few years to y'know it's all that,
y can't go toucher or nothing just because
you feel like it, 'cause it's inside you

it's not made show, they d punch y'paw or
if y tried any a that

Jack Oh yeah I know... but
Tom Look, Jack, we've made the book
— no affection for sale

Jack Well I'll make me own'

Tom (grunt) Whatever y'redoan, make
but you don't go never-hurt me

Jack Haha Well I'll feel something

Tom Suck, why not? Go ahead start

Jack You wouldn't mind

Tom What?

Jack If I did?

Tom Go for it like

Pause

Jack Cards... +
Tom cards, they pick up cards and settle or
be able to play. Tom don't like play
Jack. And y'wouldn't mind

Jack: Anyway, he done so good. I was much too fuckin' scared. Whoever he is, they is likely to call him in for a talk — then I'd know who he was.

Tom: "What'll we play?"

Jack: "Oh, no cards for me, man, not tonight. Come on, let's do a while."

Jack: *lays down the cards, reaching for the coins* Tom puts the cards down and laughs.

Tom: "Well, y' gonna make up your mind."

Jack: "What's that, Tom?"

Tom: "What y' want?" *said he asked what he will be about a bag, is that y' said he never told ya why he was with ya."*

Pauses

Jack: "Did I say that?"

Tom: "You know ya did" *(Tom picks up the cards again starts playing himself)*

Jack: "Did I? Ah, well I got confused. No need for you to worry anymore, man, you're in me make." *(Jack reaches for the bag handle, taking out that right love?"*

Tom: "I don't know, you be? Hey?" *"Course he is, good old Tom."*

Jack: *reaches into bag* Tom: *reaches for the cards* They don't look at each other.

Jack: "Anyways, how you been today?" *Tomme looks at you, pulls you in a bit as pretty as you want this moment. Look at her hair. Tom isn't that the blakken hair you ever saw?"*

Tom turns his head. *Jack holds the bag for him as he is reaching asking Tom to answer her*

Tom: "Yeah, Jack — it's awfully black."

Jack: "Yeah — and it's me, Tom."

Tom: "Yeah. Shit's yours."

Tom: *shoves down the cards and begins to smile his best. Jack: suddenly gets up with a big grin and puts it on the chair by the table. Starting to grinning*

Jack: "Come, come, as there where we can see you properly? Look at her, Tom, isn't that something? Is he in the off?"

Tom: "Beautiful."

Jack: "Only small, am she? Always was. Her looks at those little tits, Tom, don't you think they're beautiful? Sorry, love, I know I shouldn't be talkin' about you but, Jesus, the way you sit there lookin' so wonderful. I have to say something about a — Tom: don't you think her tits are wonderful?"

Tom: "Get fucked with yer, Jack." *Tom drops his hands on his lap, unzipped his zipper.*

Jack: "What? You no like her, palook that what to result her? Eh?" *Tom lets himself at the roof*

Jack: "Huh?" Ah, well you get fucked? Last time she sets there for you? Come on, we'll go back where we belong. Gotta suddenly snatches the bag back to the bed. He lets down snatching the bag, looking so it. Number 1 really be snatched, like he has been pretty strange lately, probably your boot-happy poor old Tom."

Tom: "Jack?"

Jack: "Yeah, Tom."

Tom: "Haven't tell you something?"

Jack: "Oh? What is it?"

Tom: "About. Go on look down at Jack."

Tom: "Jack."

Jack: "Yeah, Tom."

Tom: "You're all ya head."

Jack: "It is."

Tom: "Mad. *Jack, so good right off the planet — they're about you mad you're gonna go back and see that psycho*

— *Jack: "You're all ya head."*

Jack: "But what for, Tom?"

Tom: *(in disbelief) Because you to see' things that aren't lookin' there — is why*

Jack: "What's not there?"

Tom: "She's a star there."

Jack: "Tom, I'll just get her to wear the table again — tell me we can't see her tell me I'm mad — come on over over here."

Jack: *gets up, puts the bag on the chair. He reaches for reaching walking to it*

Jack: "I'm sorry, love, but Tom here needs glasses. I mean, who could miss ya? I defined here Tom has taken the piano keys in here."

Jack: "There you're Tom, now look. *He starts walking an orientation to Tom. Tom: she looks at her head*"

Tom: "Nothin' there, Jack."

Jack: "You're about me on Tom, come on, shiv's you prettiness, better for her that?"

Tom: "Jack — go and lie down, mate."

JACK



Jack: *shoves Tom, shaking his hand then leaving, leaving taking up his bag. Tom: lies down as if uninterested to any more the bag will in his hand but uninterested by Jack*

Jack: "Tom."

Tom: "What, mate?"

Jack: "You have got fucked."

Tom: "Ah."

Jack goes to his bed with his bag. Tom has gone to lie down the bag in his hand. Tom's face is already determined. Jack removes from the bag.

Jack: *(pulling up Tom) — What is it Tom?*

Tom: "Get out of my fucking way."

Jack: "Huh?" No? Oh Tom no, Tom! *Jack pushes Tom. Tom has his arms firmly across the side of the head — Jack: pushes, slips falls on front of the head and*

Jack: "No Tom! No Tom! — Don't — Tom is suddenly regular at the bag, bursting it, grabbing it and throwing it against the wall. *Tom: Jack goes walking to front by the bag, reaching, grinds to crush it, bursting a well-worn face to Tom*

Jack: "Tom?"

Tom: "It's dead, Jack."

Jack: "No."

Tom: "Dead."

Tom: "Jack."

Jack: "You fuckin' — you mad bastard! Jack: *comes and attacks Tom. They struggle, with Jack, repeating color and over his intention of killing Tom. Tom: Jack's face to the floor again. Jack has three jabs: one at Tom's face, face at his hands. Tom stands silently, looking down at Jack. Jack: takes his hands from his face, looks up again.*

Jack: "You're mad, you bastard."

Tom: "I'm sorry."

Jack: "Mad."

Tom: "It was for you, Jack."

Jack: *smiles with a meaningful understanding, turning to hang up self-disgustedly at Tom's words*

Jack: "For me?"

He laughs, suddenly triumphant, turning to pull the remains of the bag off the floor. It drags from her head as he turns again to Tom.

Jack: "You got me, knifed me down."

Tom: "I didn't want to, Jack. — I had —

Jack: "I can't fight no good as you."

Tom: "You —

Jack: "No I can't. No, but I can wait longer than you. Nobody can fight so good as their sleep."

Tom: "Jack, wait, I'm sorry, I —

Jack: "And you have to go to sleep, otherwise, you gonna just — die?"

Tom: "I had to do it, Jack."

Jack: "I'm gonna sit here, till the lights go out and I've got gonna sleep. Not tonight or any night. I'll be awake, awake when you go to sleep — and then I'll sleep, because you'll never be awake again either."

Jack: *smiles. Tom: suddenly snakes his hand, goes to sit on his bed, starts taking off his shirt. Lightens down*

Lightens up

Jack: *gets off the table, watching Tom. Tom is at bed, his back turned.*

Jack: "You still awake?"

Tom: *doesn't move or answer. Jack: shoulder*

Jack: "Course you are."

Jack: *smiles, looking, glancing at Tom. now and then a long pause*

The person who's sitting over — Jack: *shoulder softly. Tom: right side over on an elbow looks at Jack*

Jack: "Look, I'm sorry — Jack: are amzing on Tom's face? — I'll get you another one. I'll replace your bag in the morning. Okay?"

I: "Please." *Jack: shakes his head gently*

Jack: "Big." *Oh, you poor man, bastard human. "What bag?"*

He moves gently now at Tom. Tom looks back, suddenly. *Tom suddenly grabs hand-fists starts looking at the door and calling for the screen! He bangs and bangs, making a hell of a noise.*

Screams: "Vince! All right! What number from (showing) Three? Number Three? Darker?" *Darkens*

BETWEEN THE LINES

It is no accident that Henry Lawson and his work should be going through a rebirth of interest. His life and work hold significance for the present generation of Australians.

He was, then, a champion of youth and the true workers of the country. He was a nationalist without any of the jingoism that sometimes occurs.

He fought his own poverty, lack of education and partial deafness, and wrote himself to the top of the literary pole. He is one of the greatest of Australian writers. His determination is an inspiration to the youth of today.

"I hate the wrongs I read about."

"I hate the wrongs I see."

Lawson writings will inspire those who are apathetic about the problems facing this nation of ours because he pleads for all Australians rather than any particular sectional interest. His voice that should be heard once more. The magazine that last published his visionary words was *The Bulletin*. It was through its pages that he reached his fellow Australian. It is right that with his rebirth he should again reach his audience through a paper that still champions the people.

Lawson's truths still hold despite the changes within our society because Lawson was a creative visionary. He saw the possibilities for our country and our society and his words hold even more significance for us because we are Lawson's Future Vision.

"I have this to say to my people: 'was back my respect if you can!'"

"You would challenge me to optimism."

"We'll win in the end, despite all the east and hypocrisy that pervades the land."

It is time for *The Bulletin* to reassess this great Australian writer and visionary.



BETWEEN THE LINES

'I waited two years for the right script.'

The first production in the new 680 Playhouse at 289 Miller Street is called *Between The Lines*, a play written by Marcus Cooney and starring Alexander May. The play is produced by John Harris Productions.

John (Percy) Harris was one of the first graduates of the Design course at the National Institute of Dramatic Art. He has worked with the Queensland Theatre Company, The Q Theatre and the Ensemble Theatre. Two years ago John found himself involuntarily sub-adding a production he was involved with. I became disenchanted because of the gamesmanship played by certain people whose attitudes I believed were incompatible with professionalism.

John gave over theatre and concentrated on film work. He was not prepared to involve himself in theatre until he could put his principles regarding professionalism in theatre into practice. I waited two years for the right conditions. The right conditions were a good editor and a theatre whose management believed in professionalism in the theatre. The script was Marcus Cooney's *Between The Lines*, the theatre was John Howitt's new 680 Playhouse. John had already confounded the skeptics by running a success of the 680 coffee-theatre Killers.

Being in the right time at the right place is the most enduring of theatrical devices and that set of coincidences played its part in John's return to theatre.

'I lay down at Cointer's Retreat on the Pfeiffer', where I share a house with the actor John Jefferet and his wife Rose. I used to see this bearded bear of a man on the ferry. I thought he was one of the local fishermen. John arrived back one Saturday with Bill Hunter, the editor, and the editor was quite

interested in getting Marcus to help him with the scenario for a film called 'No Heroes' which we hope will go into production next year.

One thing led to another and John read a script that Marcus was finishing at that time. The script was *'Between The Lines'*. John at that time was actively looking for possible venues. One possibility was the Waygate Chapel Theatre but they were in the throes of refurbishing the building and it wouldn't be ready for January 1979 at the earliest.

The search for a venue had John ringing with the koalaburns that root in the trees around his house and returning long after the last koalaburn had been picked down for the night. The search was successfully completed when John rang Amy McGrath whose Australia Theatre is well known to Sydney readers. Amy suggested that John get in touch with John Howitt. Jefferet only hours after John had signed the papers to take over the Independent Theatre. John read the play and agreed to allow John's production to be the first played at the new Six Eighty Playhouse.



BETWEEN THE LINES

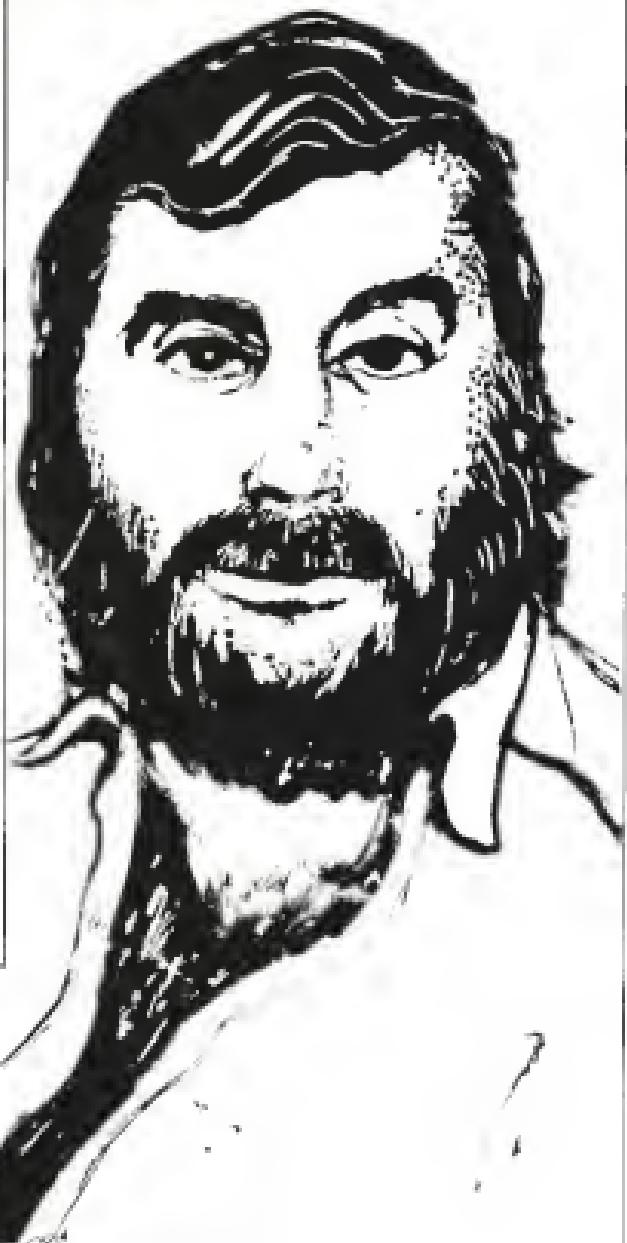
Marcus Cooney describes Hirsch as 'an expatriate Tennessee' and Tennessee as 'a great place to be from'. Between The Lines' is the fourth stage play to be produced. He had spent two years researching the life of Henry Lawson for a screenplay. 'I wrote the first draft of the screenplay for a place but he had no money to develop it so it never got off the ground.'

When the screenplay project folded, Marcus decided to write something on Lawson for the stage — 'to get some return on my investment of time and mental energy'. It was easier said than done, he felt he had an obligation to the man not to misrepresent him. The obvious starting point as far as Marcus was concerned was how Lawson described and saw himself. There was sufficient explicit correspondence to make that possible. The problem then resulted to how the material could be presented.

'I remembered how much admiration Lawson had for (playwright) and that supplied my answer. Lawson was perennially broke so why shouldn't he hold a personal reading of his work to raise money? It is out of this situation that the tensions and磨难 emerge in the play. Marcus admits that much of the material was written by Lawson. The supreme compliment for me will be if nobody can recognise where Lawson ends and Cooney begins. There was no other way to tackle the problem if I wanted to stay true to the man.'

Marcus is a retiring type and it took some persuasion to get him to talk to me. 'I don't go in much for that business. I think it is valid for performers to make some comments about the characters they play. Writers are a different matter.'

He may be a retiring type but from my inquiries amongst the people who know him he is not so much Jane Harris' 'Big Bear of a man' as a wild Tennessee whose colourful forays from his lair on the Prizewinner are always fuelled with some trepidation. Perhaps there is more than the writing which makes Marcus see some parallels between his and Lawson's life.



BETWEEN THE LINES



The man chosen to play the role of Henry Lawson in 'Between The Lines', is Sydney actor Alexander Hey. Although his career began with classical training, Alex points out that 'that was only one facet. I have had many roles in the theatre — dancer, acrobat, shepherd, and some painter as well as the broader actor and director. I was prepared to work at anything that advanced the knowledge at my craft.'

Alexander was a tutor at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, although he admits that he doesn't know what acting is, and whatever it is, he is definitely certain it can't be taught; you can watch the rose as it grows and occasionally add a little manure.

Alexander has always been interested in new playwriting. Robin Lovelace and he, shares the responsibility for the first season of the Jane St Theatre in Sydney. The Jane St Theatre was specifically founded as a venue for new Australian plays. In keeping with his interest in new plays, Alex is on the committee of the Australian National Playwrights conference and was Director of the conference in 1975.

Alex himself produced new plays by writers — Tom Kennedy, Dorothy Hewitt, and James Seirer, at the Jane Street centre.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Eleven years ago a starry-eyed young man quit his job with B P Australia and launched himself in the entertainment industry. After an impressive twenty-one productions over the last eleven years, all of which were devised, produced, directed and performed in by this same young man, his future seems assured. His latest show opens in October and the Arts Council of N.S.W. want to tour the show next year. Negotiations are in progress for a National T.V. show based on the unique and unusual talents of this remarkable young man for a man who started his own theatre because no one would give him a break.

That man is John Howitt, Proprietor of The Kiln, 360 Collins

Theatre in Sydney. He will celebrate the theatre's 11th birthday on Thursday October 27 with his new show 'Around the World in 80 Minutes + 10'.

John has decided to expand in other directions as well and in late 1986 he offered to purchase the Independent School of Dramatic Art from Miss Dona Fulton. The sale did not go through and after the resignation of Miss Fulton Owen, the former Principal of the School, John decided with Miss Owen to create a new school to provide a growing outlet for training not only for professional theatre but film and television as well.

The Gold Drama School provides a three year diploma course so only those students with potential are

accepted with admission by audition only. The forty-two week study year is divided into three terms with classes held in the evenings so part-time students can undertake the course while still undertaking employment outside the entertainment industry. Subjects cover roles and speech, movement with Mr Keith Bass, well known for his movement classes, dialects, styles, make-up, modern acting and playreading.

Video and radio training for senior students is also offered. This is another valuable part of the course particularly with the renewed interest in the Australian film industry. It is interesting to note that the tutorial staff have a background of training at such in-



BETWEEN THE LINES

studios as R.A.D.A. The Old Vic and the Royal Academy of Music and Drama. The school is located at Macman, Sydney and any readers interested in making further enquiries can ring Sydney 965 3688 or write to the school at Box 371, Spur Junction 2000.

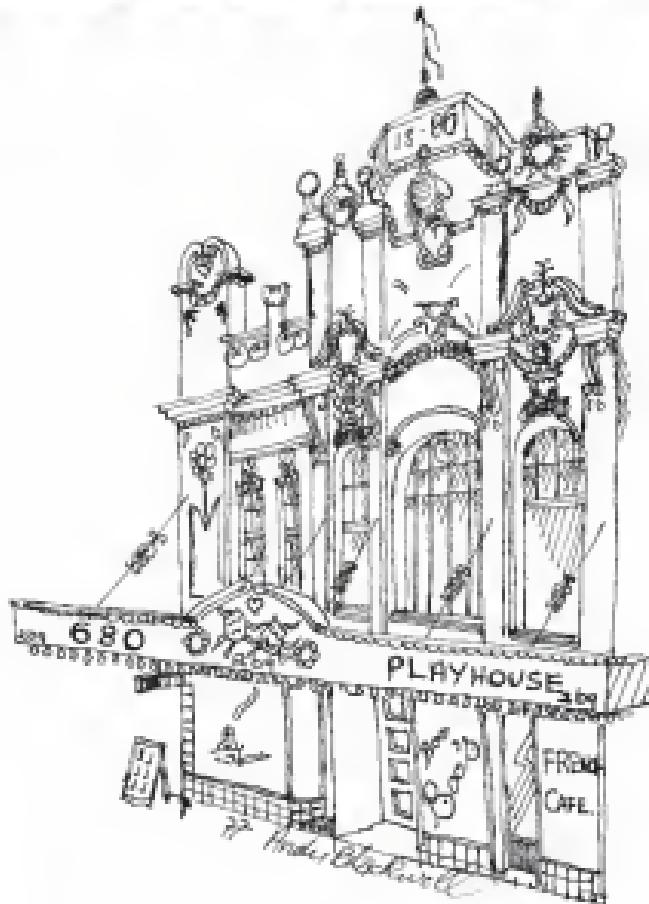
Since the establishment of the school John has not been resting on his laurels. When the Independent Theatre at North Sydney closed after almost forty years John acquired the lease on the premises and the John's Cafe Playhouse officially opens its doors about the same time that John's Coffee Theatre celebrates eleven years of first class entertainment. Included in the

new complex is also John's French Cafe, specialising in French pastries and in old recipes of John's grandmother, Grand-mere's meat balls. For John the basic aim is to encourage new Australian plays and players. "But at all times we must remember to be entertaining", is the only dictum qualified the underlying rationale for the Playhouse.

Commercial productions will use the venue six days a week on Sundays there will be productions from the students of the Drama School and other local drama groups and amateur troupes. There will be space available to workshop new Australian plays and musicals, this should give added impetus to Australian writers. Every per-

son involved in the entertainment industry must wish John Horst the 'best of Australian'. Every venue staying open in Sydney offers that many more employment opportunities for the future.

The theatre is being redesigned to offer the greatest flexibility in mounting productions. This is good news to those of us who have suffered from tunnel vision of the Independent Theatre in the past and although no box policy has been established John is committed to booking the best plays with a commitment of the highest calibre only, whether it be drama, musicals, revues etc.



Sydney Comes Second Best

It is not often that a regional company and the Australian Opera open productions of the same opera on consecutive nights, and it is even rarer, when such a coincidence does occur, that the national company comes the second best. But such a strange situation did in fact occur on 13 and 16 July last, with productions of *Brabernes* and *Sydney* of Leonce's counterpart of a little two-act *Pagliacci*.

Despite several limitations imposed by a frequently inappropriate setting, the Brisbane *Pagliacci* was a memorable piece of music theatre, despite all the advantages conferred by a fully professional company and a much more judicious setting; the Sydney *Pagliacci* was one of the least satisfying opera experiences I have ever been my misfortune to be confronted with. Its failure was both momentous and irretrievable on several grounds, for it arose through an almost total combination, seemingly, of terrible casting, poor production and unapologetic badinage. It was doubly unfortunate because it was one half of a double bill whose other half was much less, and because of so easily could have been a triumph instead of a disaster.

The major fault in the *Pagliacci* was Sesto Bruscaldi's Cavaradossi, neither vocally nor dramatically was he convincing or effective for a moment, and this point is so vital to an effective realisation of *Pagliacci* on stage that the poor simply cannot succeed without a strong Cavaradossi. But a pleasant enough voice and stage presence, could for all I know be thoroughly acceptable in any number of other roles, but it is absurd that he was apparently chosen in preference to two other tenors either of whom would have been suiting in the part.

And this is no matter of mere comparison, for Donald Smith, who has just returned to the AO as a guest artist, is a superb Cavaradossi — one might quite justifiably put an air of a lisp to say it is his best role, dramatically, and an unknown, locally, Sydney reader by the name of Yusef Karyan could also have been engaged to sing the role. In the event, Bruscaldi got the Cavaradossi part in *Brabernes* and Smith made his rapprochement with the national company at *Don José* in *Carreño*, a role he sings — as always — magnificently but acts hardly adequately in the aftermath of an dynamic singing actor as Ron Stevens.

The Brabernes coupling of *Pagliacci* with its traditional twin, *Masone's Cavalleria Rusticana*, was an unequalled production triumph for John Thompson and his Queensland Opera Company despite the

quirky accoutrements of the Brisbane City Hall with its circular dome that alternately confers on singers the false impression they are being depicted vertically and that they have all lost their voices completely thereby by moving a few feet one way or the other.

Though there were flaws of detail — a series of house-breaking and successive stabbings about that came curiously close to transforming drama into melodrama, and some very strange lighting effects — the overall concept of this City/Pag was a

brilliant stroke of theatre that never faltered for a moment. The set, designed by James Robertson of the Queensland Theatre Company, consisted of a huge church facade that both visually obfuscated the feeling of the raised hall and at the same time provided an ideal visual atmosphere for Cavalleria Rusticana. The disarranged portions of the hall's permanently resident pipe organ that peeped out from behind only served to enhance the feeling of the piece.

The orchestra, of course had to be



DON SMITH as Cavaradossi (Queensland Opera) below Australian Opera





Barbara Bonney, *Patna Fair*, July 1981

stretched out on the flat floor between the stage and the audience, surrounded on the expanse with body of the hall for as depth by rows of open floor space which were sometimes invaded by performers — as during the religious processions in *Caravaggio's Matthew*, which moved across between the audience and the orchestra before returning the stage proper from the opposite side.

Bei the most striking innovation of the evening came after interval, when the enormous corps of players in *Poppea* arrived through a side door complete with a cart bearing the last and prior of the three canopy stage that was to provide the venue for the pantomime within the opera that leads to the final denouement. On opening night, when I saw the CAV/Pug, Kayrose neatly demarcated the court-and-moral framework, on the following night, while I was enduring the Sydney Pug, he apparently usually did.

In the Queensland *Caravaggio's Matthew*, Valeri Haskin was an avuncular Simeone and Robert Harrington a very good Donaldo, though they did not strike quite as many dramatic sparks off each other as I imagined in the drawings, and Dame Winifred was a thoroughly convincing Alba. In *Poppea*, Kayrose turned in a remarkably effective dramatic performance that built to the notion of discrediting matron law in the process that made the heartless double murder at the end thoroughly credible, but he also sang with great power and conviction and beauty, sounding at times uncannily like Donald Sinden in his best *Phantom Toll* (Medea) nearly matched her in all departments. Paul Neal as Tisbe, did full justice to the Prologue, and held up his sister of the cast of the dramatic scenes wonderfully. John Ryall was an excellent Bagoz.

The following night, at the Sydney Opera House, things started off well enough when John Shaw sang a very strong Prologue, though it lacked a measure of the dramatic, projecting Robert Allman has given to the part in the past that I can point an though determinedly I have already had enough about Bagoz, but his Nodica, Bergl Purlieus, failed to make much of an impression either vocally or dramatically and John Pugnati never came to life at the lower

Silva. Graeme Dyer's Bagoz was the best performance of the night, but the role is not important enough to salvage an otherwise calamitous staging of the piece. Melville O'Connell's return of Stephen Hall's original production eliminated many of its original good points without introducing any new virtues of its own. And Richard Bonney seemed all at ease with Phaedra.

Though not, at least initially, to the same extent, with Peacock's *Sacré*, *Angélique*, with Jane Sutherland in the title role, which completed the Sydney double bill. Indeed, this was just about as good a realisation of *Angélique* as one is ever likely to see. Sutherland was blessed with a positive battery of female AD's in the supporting roles (Elizabeth Farnell, Lesley Strelak, Cynthia Johnson, Heather Begg, Isobel Buchanan, Rosalind Rostock), and may reasonably and need very convincingly herself — posturing about appropriately in the background with watered-out red and trout in the early stages, establishing her character before the singing took over. Sacré *Angélique*, though, can probably only be seen to its best advantage when it is played as Peacock intended at the centre of the *Tarare* between the forces melodicities of M. Talante and the wry black comedy of Queen Shéhérazade.

Robert Hartley's production of Offenbach's *Madame Favart* was a thoroughly delightful romp at a high-cut design (the usual frantic bairns of bygones's habitual Recyclable company and the acoustic acrobatics) repeatedly arising from any attempt to stage opera in the round. The idea of building a mock-circus, raised in the middle of Rochester Town Hall was fine, but the actual result was somewhat pretentious and cramped for the performers and it was well nigh impossible to catch off the bustle from any seat in the hall save on average you would only be using at about one-quarter of the time.

But there were many compensations in the unerring inventiveness of Hartley's direction — from Cucco's first appearance at the desert island, bare shoulder high on a raft, with characters in the port of a nymph all round, to the cascade of costumes which descended through the ceiling to mark the final wedding tableau.

But far and away the greatest achievement of the operatic month was the Australian Opera's realisation of Verdi's *Macbeth*, a new production by John Copley which opened on 4 August, conducted by John Prentsch and starring John Shaw in the title role and Elizabeth Carroll as Lady Macbeth. Though there were some sizeable problems at opening (there was no doubt about that), this would be one of the AOP's better efforts once it had a chance to settle down.

Much of the strength, and a little of the weakness, of this *Macbeth* must be attributed to Stephen Lortzing's design, for visually stunning as the sets are they require intricate and cumbersome scene changes which simply cannot be so accomplished with great speed — and thus

inevitably undermine the episodic nature of this opera, which contains no less than 10 scenes in its four acts. The problem is most serious where it stretches into the curtain that must — during the closing stages, for Verdi's Act IV has four scenes, most of them quite short.

But there is no doubtting the brilliance of the Lortzing design: the massive walls of open granite suspended crossways, the grotesquely distorted thrones and cruelly threatening instruments of war, the mighty totemes with scowly faces of red that allow the *Macbeths* — symbols, as death, of the blood they spill — cause to be spilt all in greater finality.

The lighting, contributed jointly to Copley and Roger Burnet, is equally brilliant, cloaking the enormous sets with sheer edges as if they are dropping-damp and crimson-gold, rarely, always, empty, though as shadowed against a dark black background that never is there the slightest difficulty in seeing what the audience needs to see: strategic pools of light reveal form and action with crystal clarity.

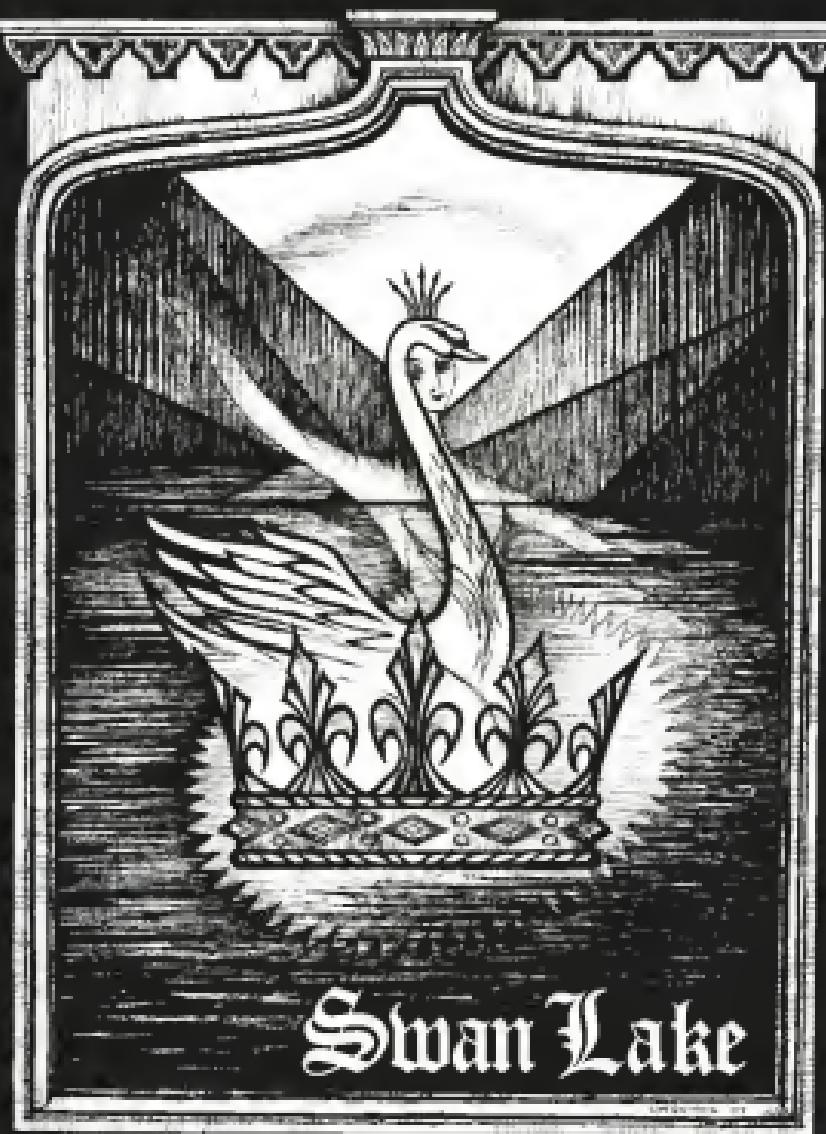
The production begins magnificently with some of the robust matinées of the opera, Lady Macbeth's misappropriation and her logical appearance at the end of the second weather scene, for instance, is undercut by a sudden scene change back to the castle in full view of the audience as Macbeth returns (why could not more of the scene changes have been handled in the proscenium and effective?)

And Fleance (Flemersky) played by Hugh Morris turns up and goes to sleep during Banquo's pre-murder aria, waking up at the dying warning of his father and confronting the assassin by hurling a cloak at them — that finding some audience to his escape from 20-solid well-armed things. The difficult two appearances of Banquo's ghost are effectively handled elsewhere the production is reasonably logical and straightforward rather than spectacularly innovative, though some may find the witches rather too grotesque of appearance and too heavily masked to be able to do full justice to their vocal parts.

Coppél's Lady Macbeth was a total unknown on opening night, but had already gained a great deal of dramatic power a couple of days later, likewise Shaw's Macbeth. Before the season is ended, they will no doubt have consolidated an electrifying stage marriage. Donald Shaik's Banquo is magnificently sang and acted, Lamberto Pavarotti's Macduff a ruffian tenor, Paul Ferrer's Malcolm an excellent portrayer of the embittered youth who is as vital to the plot but has so little time on stage to prove it. Prentsch's costuming was impeccable but a little tiring.

Overall, this was a fine realisation of an opera of considerable merit, a pleasant and useful piece, if at times unconvincingly so. Far from a masterpiece, when compared to Verdi's last two Shakespearean operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, but a very strong and effective night at the opera for all that.

THE AUSTRALIAN BALLET



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and for BRISBANE, CANBERRA, ADELAIDE and PERTH during the 1978 season.

Thorne, *Theatre in Australia*

Hagen, *Respect for Acting*



THEATRES IN AUSTRALIA

An Historical Perspective of
Significant Buildings

ROSS THORNE



Touring country towns can be a dismaying experience. I remember arriving at the School of Arts, in Mervin, N.S.W., for a single performance of a show designed for a thrust stage in that plain, empty, paneaued-and-assembly-hall of a theatre. We had trouble filling the limited seats, but along the 1881 Victorian gallery with its ornate egg-shaped balustrade which Ross Thorne finds interesting it has *Theatre in Australia*. Only I had had the book then, but it is remarkable for such old Australian theatres might have affected the gloomy feeling of the place.

We are lucky to have Professor Thorne. He is as erudite with a scholarly interest in theatre buildings, but he also brings to his work a sensitive understanding of what theatres are for, and an enthusiasm which can be sensed in every page and every scholarly organised case study. In that new book the text of a Kathleen Robinson lecture he gave in Sydney in 1976, he is writing, who is an historian — showing, through selected examples, some of the ways in which attitudes to theatres changed during the 19th and early 20th century, and how these changes are reflected in the buildings themselves.

He explains at the beginning that the selection, for a short paper, has had to be partly arbitrary, but that he has tried to include as much new material as possible since the publication (in 1971) of his large, 2 volume *Theatre Buildings in Australia to 1900*. He also claims to have devoted from his savings that and an effort to some well known theatres, but there is plenty of room for nostalgia or at least recognition involvement, with the theatres he does evoke.

This is more than a supplement to the earlier book and it is of more than scholarly interest. What theatres they were! Barthélemy's Theatre Royal in Sydney, opened in 1838, must have been impossibly crowded by our standards still stuffy and uncomfortable. Back in the Georgian style of the famous mineral theatre in Edinburgh, Yorkhousie, it had different types of seating in a variety of known as modern theatres. The different feeling in sitting in the pit, or in a box next to the proscenium, or in the upper gallery would have been massive. Or the Little Theatre in Victoria but because of the slightly delayed impact of the gold rushes, in 1857?

The photographs show a dilapidated brick shell stuck on the back of what was originally a pub, but the list of entertainments that took place there makes it look almost romantic. It is fascinating to speculate on what happened in those ratty places of mass entertainment. We must be grateful to Professor Thorne for capturing this sense of our theatrical past.

The book also reaches on some of the dreadful country arts centres that have been built since the second world war. Designed as all-purpose rooms for plays, concerts, and dances, they end up being suitable for none, where a number of smaller specialized areas might not only cater for different needs more efficiently, but be cheaper to build.

In a book such as this the illustrations are obviously very important, for better than the text they can give an idea of what these theatres were like and how it felt to be part of an audience, or a performer, in them. Unfortunately the quality of many of the pictures is very poor. The ground plans and cross-sections of theatres are straightforward and understandable, but so the layout many of the photographs are unclear and uninformative. Particularly, some of the exterior pictures are surprising to the untrained eye, of the interior features which the captions suggest are the point of including them. In other cases they are too dark, or simply give no idea of what the theatre looks like to be, or on the pictures of the New Farmers Theatre in Penola and Walter Sturt Griffin's Open-Air Theatre in Coonabarabran, Sydney. Some of the pictures are good. If you want to find out exactly what's in a name, have a look at the photo of the Theatre Royal, Charleville, Queensland.

There is also what I assume to be a composite in the caption to Illustration 2

where the date should surely be 1803, not 1883, for the Theatre Royal, Sydney. I mention this triviality because it is a minor issue. The initial confusion about that, theatre name when 1838 was revised as 1816, as Professor Thorne explains, has no hope that researchers in 200 years will not be further confused.

Uta Hagen's book, *Respect for Acting*, respects a particular school of acting — the Method. Ms Hagen is a former pupil of Lee Strasberg and a successful professional actor and teacher in the United States. Her book is an often very personal account of the process by which actors can achieve truth in performance through finding the truth of a dramatic action in themselves. The principal drive for doing this is "identification", whereby actors use elements of their own lives and their own experience to make real, for themselves, the actions of the character. The example of this which I've always liked best, rather facetiously, is to imagine, in the suggestion that if you're ever worried to fall a rambler on a camping trip then you have the infinite memory to play Oedipus (this was given by Rudolf Hofmann, of whom Ms Hagen, through Strasberg is a grand-pupil, in so speak).

Central to the book is a series of 19 "Object Exercises" which are intended as an equivalent to ballet exercises or music practice. Each is a way of retraining different sorts of behaviour — in order to understand and then consolidate that, at honest action on stage.

It is difficult to say how useful this book would be for Australian actors. Certainly the conditions for actors in the United States appear very different. The commercial pressures on them seem very great and there is even less chance for ensemble work than there is here. Also I worry that these methods might lead actors' eyes more firmly into the arms of those critics for whom the words "convincing" and "credible" are the highest praise. We need less convention and more commitment, less credibility and more ideas.

Respect for Acting does demonstrate just that respect for a profession which every layman thinks he could do if he tried and of which he should have a valid claim. It also shows a commendable concern for audience and professional self-discipline, and contains the odd refreshingly pat Old Truth. If it doesn't add anything to the theory of acting, it at least gives a valuable insight into the mind and Method of an actress and teacher highly thought of in her own country.

Rescued from the footnotes: Mozart's *Zaide* Major film score: Shostakovich's *The Gadfly*

To had another workable Mozart opera would be counted by most music lovers as one of the most agreeable kinds of present *Zaide*, composed in 1791 when Mozart was twenty-four, is not quite that. Mozart did not finish it. Nor did he give it a title. *Zaide* has been extracted for general use as a title from the conjecture that it is the leading soprano's name. Furthermore, we can had better representation of the basic story when *Zaide* by turning to another German opera derived from Sogno and other traditions in *Der Barbier von Siviglia* (The Barber from the Mameluk) or *The Strumpf* or (as it is sometimes called) Mozart was ten years older when he wrote *Der Entzükung*, and in effect has grown in musical ambition, discrimination in stagecraft and consistency of characterization.

All the same, *Zaide* is evidently not to be condemned to be one of the less frequently consulted volumes in the splendid New Mozart Edition. A group of excellent solo singers (Ulrich Müller, Peter Schreier, Ingo Metzmacher, among many have been brought together with the Berlin State Orchestra (East Berlin, that is, where a superb tradition in the playing of Mozart and Beethoven under the direction of Ferdinand Ries) to record all the music of *Zaide* that actually survives (Philips 6700 097, 2 discs).

It would be difficult to present this torso of *Zaide* in the theatre as a self-sufficient entertainment. This is where recording can rescue a substantial piece of music like this from relegation to the footnotes of musical history and keep it permanently in circulation as living music without asking that listeners accept it as part of the standard operatic repertoire.

The remains of *Zaide* are quite considerable. We have three numbers complete among the manuscript papers that Mozart's widow, Constanze, discovered among his effects after his death. This compares with twenty-one numbers in the complete score of *Der Entzükung*. In other words, we have in *Zaide* approximately the seventh of the score as it probably would have existed had Mozart completed it. Why he did not complete it we shall never know. For certain, it seems. He wanted very much to write operas. He had probably heard that plan to promote German opera in Vienna were under way.

The quality of the music that survives makes it clear that he did not start his composing repose in writing the score. He may have been brought up short by a realisation that the dramatic contractions



of the text as far as we can deduce it, was rather lame. Everything is ruled by magnanimity — as indeed it is in *Der Entzükung*. The difference is that *Der Entzükung* at least supplies us with a certain amount of excitement and fun on the way to the predictable denouement.

Although the magnanimity of *Der Entzükung* may be unpredictable, it is based on a conscious decision by the Eastern potentate who is the owner of the terms referred to in the opera's title. In *Zaide* the magnanimity of the comparative terms springs from two sets of far-fetched correspondences.

There is an *Ostara* in *Zaide* as there is in *Der Entzükung*, and he fulfils a similar function in purifying and supervising the establishment. But his single role also in *Zaide* is much simpler, easier and represents a much more rudimentary kind of characterization than the rudimentarily gaudy of the *Ostara* we know in *Der Entzükung*. We cannot be certain but have much additional fun would have been incorporated in the spoken dialogue of the piece. *Zaide* belongs to the German Singspiel tradition in having spoken dialogue.

The libretto from which Mozart was working has been lost, and his score contains only the verbal cues for the musical numbers. The reconstruction involved in the present recording has included the repositioning of an ariette from elsewhere in Mozart's output (the Overture-Symphony in G, K. 318, which Alfred Einstein thought, mistakenly it seems, may have belonged to the opera in its early stage) the supply of linking dialogue from a text which was evidently one of the sources of Mozart's libretto (Salzburger, and the leading off of the proceedings, in the absence of a genuine conclusion with a festive march, K. 335 No. 1).

Zaide has one extremely interesting

element in it which is not to be found in *Der Entzükung*. It has two numbers in overture-like technique in the older sense of the term. The words of these two numbers are spoken, and the orchestral music supplied by Mozart punctuates the words and acts as an expressive commentary on them. Mozart had admired the application of this technique in a complete drama by the Czech composer Bedrich Smetana and more than once contemplated setting a drama on similar lines himself.

The two numbered numbers in *Zaide* give us a very good idea, then, of how the greatest operatic dramatist of the 19th century would have approached such a task. One is a monologue by the slave Constanze, the other is a dialogue between the nation Schlesien and its emperor Ostara. I find these numbers very eloquent. It is clear that Mozart had used all the stagecraft devices and rhetorical vocabulary at his disposal on the orchestral punctuation of the spoken words.

The arias, unlike its counterpart in the *Entzükung*, are a singing as well as speaking part. But the problems of these discs have substantiated, in my view, skilled actors for the singers of the individualised passages and also in the spoken dialogue.

This would not be acceptable in the theatre, of course, but it has met on disc, especially when the speaking and singing voices are well-rehearsed as separate, as they are here. The music that Peter Schreier sings as Glomar is much more concentrated and simple than the combination of spoken word and dramatic orchestral writing which involved his speaking counterpart, Gerd Grzesz.

Werner Höftcamp, who sings the part of the sultan, is a basso rared with one outstanding trait of stage *Zaide*: his use of defiance. "Tiget" (were master Glomar) "Tiget" sharpens your claws, and producers of the *Entzükung* are likely to look at this pace with longing as representing a much more concise and stage-worthy contribution to the drama at this point of the story than the gigantic musical monologue provided for Constanze in that opera at a similar point of the action.

Edith Mathis, one of the most enchanting singers to have come out of Germany in recent years, is not quite equal in this part but lyrical voice is a thicker light for the task, and the part also too consistently just a notch or two high for her to be really comfortable. Even in the croaking aria *Wahr sei*! (First, gently), which develops its lovely rolling pad from being set in market measure, the latter

becomes aware, much as he is enjoying the style of Max Martin's singing, that the vocal line at times seems to be arriving at G or A above the stave at about every second note.

Alberon, a trusted servant of the sultan, who turns out not only to have saved the sultan's life (in a scene curiously long past here but also to be the father of both Zurga and Gennaro), is an interesting character not paralleled exactly in *The Edgeley*. He has two well-made arias which are effective on record but which, I think, would not work particularly well in the theatre. There is a beautiful quod (76/10), distinguished by the sonics of its woodwind section, and a trio (76/8) in which the orchestral suggestion of thunder is absorbed into the total musical fabric without breaking it.

I recommend the set not only to lovers of Mozart but also to anyone interested in the history of the Staged at the 18th century. Singing, orchestral playing and recording are all of a high order.

There are huge tracts of Soviet film which remain unknown to us. I have never heard of the like *The Gaufly*, but say we have released here a complete disc of the music written by Shostakovich for that film (NFMV/Melodiya ASD 3289). For that matter, most of Shostakovich's great unknown work for Soviet film would be unknown to most of us with the exception of his score for the celebrated Hammer film of 1955. *The Gaufly* was apparently made in 1955.

The title is not particularly evocative of the kind of story that it tells. The Gaufly was apparently the nickname of an Italian 19th century patriot fighting against the hated Austrian overlords of considerable tracts of Northern Italy. A. L. Novitskii apparently wrote the story in the form of a novel somewhere near the beginning of this century, and the same name has also yielded, I have a Soviet opera.

Perhaps because the film is an historical adventure, Shostakovich's music is not usually characteristic of his mature style. He has drawn much more loosely on his Russian symphonic heritage in this score than he did in his works for the privately-hall Tchaikovsky, rarely mentioned in one of Shostakovich's analytic postscripts, in much as evidence. The kind of stylized debt does not weaken the quality of the music in terms of its stated purpose, it merely blurs its identity a little.

The score, in other words, is clearly the work of a master and a well worth hearing in its own right. It is only the accident of its being tied to a film so far unknown or little known in the world at large that has prevented it from being recognized up to now as one of the major scores of the history of film music. The recording has been made by the USSR Cinema Symphony Orchestra conducted by Leonid Kirovskiy (not the conductor, who is Aman). My only technical complaint is that the cut-offs in some of the staves are a little premature.

Two conservative managements



It would seem to me that the Edgeley organization was capable of thinking in the long term, especially in terms of the affairs of the six overseas ballet curcuses running Australia.

The mentality of the last bunch seems to be the driving force. Always we get these moderately good overseas ballet companies, even overpriced, under-rehearsed, badly conducted, half-bright block-buster ballets. Always they are the last resort to some "superstar" or other.

Steve Roffell, Narrey, as it well known in the public mind, Edgeley's always seem to think he is good for the box office, though audiences hardly seem to major not on the evidence of the material as far.

In the last few years, only two companies stand out as anything really worthwhile in presentation, in choreography or entertainment. These being Netherlands Dans Theater and the Stuttgart Ballet. Edgeley's got that Hague bunch (thoroughly sprung) with the Netherlands Dans Theater season. But it was apparently their own fault. They over-publicised their theory programme for the age-age with particularity, the Ober Theater, there was Maria Matrasova. Everybody flocked along to be titillated by that, and ignored the other two programmes which were filled with innovative choreography of far greater worth than the tedious expense of Matrasova dragging in slow weight along.

The Edgeley corporation obviously thought that Australians didn't understand modern choreography and wouldn't want it there they even bothered to do a bit of market research? No, apart from the Stuttgart (which was not "played safe" with Cranko's *Swing* of the Shostak, we've had the Bolshoi Ballet, along yet another Cr. Sylphide with a couple of pas de deux's thrown in, the endless folk dance groups from Siberia or Georgia or Old Europe where, and more recently the London Festival Ballet with *The Sleeping Beauty* and now *Romeo and Juliet*, both

trites with Narrey.

I thought Narrey's own version of *Sleeping Beauty* an absolute muddle. All that wistful dressing and silly tutu ad dancin' and to diagnose an ethereal ignorance of what makes for choreographic structure in a full length work. The same goes for *Romeo and Juliet* (s. Narrey) at last, making that he's approaching the end of the rainbow and has decided to turn choreographer now, leaving them on some gallible company that will take them because they need his PR image for a healthy box office taking? Could not something of the "pre-ten week, that's all they understand" mentality, as Nelli Melia's famous, have apply? Do these "superstars" dance below that level for us Down Under, leaving it at a bit of a holiday?

Of course audiences will love a base at Australia, they don't go to the ballet to see good dancing, they go only for the expense, culinary culture at its worse.

Edgeley's obviously aren't going to bother to educate and inform them and thereby aid and abet the rotting circle of ignorance.

I almost didn't get to see this present version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Edgeley's decided that Theatre Australia wasn't worthy as a publicity factor therefore no complimentary press would be forthcoming, going instead to those whores of lower-division, the reviewers of the cellular and shadowy likes *The Star*, *The Mirror* and *The Telegraph*.

Has I expected to inform and analyse the like of which Theatre Australia is capable (and yet I think I am capable of giving a) goes for broke. It's the publicity factor that matters. Strength how Edgeley's blow hot and cold with the press.

Anyways, I did get to see the ballet. I had a couple of friends in the Company and they managed to pull a string at the box office for me (Sed Bland would have been proud of me).

It was what I had expected it to be, a pompous, overblown, mainly choreographed sides from nowhere here. Of all the R and J's I've seen (including Gergiev's, Magadan, Cranko and Bayad) this was the worst. Indeed, I would even go so far as to say that Narrey has found his influences here and there in all these choreographers and then, into this hotch-potch, specifically that final pas de deux on the tomb stone which bears a remarkable resemblance to Birket's *surviving* effort (jet to the Berlin music of all things).

It just wasn't good enough. To my mind, the orchestra was terrible, the set changed

B

were unimpressive, the sympathetic audience got in the way, the programmes were a bit off and at times the overfed, over-entertained audience applauded mainly on their spouses.

Anyway, the news is that Edgley's fed that this was the last of the extravaganzas, it being too expensive to keep doing. (They say they take risks but for the life of me I can't see how.)

Look, however, the great draw card is Nutcracker, right?

So why back here with these touring ballet companies? Why not arrange one of those "Nutcracker and Friends" parcels that always go down so well in London and New York? With the name Nutcracker in the publicity blurb, audiences would be assured. Yet with ballets like *Swan Lake*, *Apollon* and the *Music Makers*, say, the overheads would be cut dramatically, savings would be minimised and Australian audiences would be given a chance to see great works by great choreographers, well danced (despite Nutcracker it would serve to educate the audience).

This might be the plan for the future, what with Edgley's packing Hobby Ballettman off around the world to pick up names for a choreographic programme next year. Who knows, they might come up with something interesting next time.

Now that Asua Woodhams has resigned, what has been decided for the future of the Australian Ballet? What is Peter Bales going to do? Towards minimising the company after so many losses at the end of the year? Kelvin Cox is going, so is Jonathan Kelly unengaged others?

Are we going to get the *Alceste* Ballet until it is running out of our ears? (Let's hope that Stafurkoff's performance in the tour and local venue posts paid to let *Alceste* run in Sydney ever again.)

The Board is casting around already for a replacement (John Field took one look at the contract a long time ago and left the next week, eager to get among the international ballet traps). The sum of things does nothing but engender total demotivation amongst the dancers and apprehension amongst the audience.

If the Board and Mr Bales are thinking of concentrating on the full length ballet, hoping to keep these subscribers, let them remember that those subscribers are elderly, are dying off every year and the new ones are concerned with these tattering pensions.

Also, they should note that the Australian Opera has had a lot of subscribers left, surrounded by people protesting against a constant diet of things like *Madame Butterfly*, *Carries* and *Frederico*.

Audience tastes change and sometimes adjustments are too slow off the mark in adjusting to them.

Again it is the problem (and one that Woodhams has tried to battle) of not looking and planning far enough into the future. The Board voted recently in overwhelming confidence in Mr Bales

who by the way is also the Secretary to the Board, and accepted with alacrity Miss Woodhams' resignation.

But underneath all the noise, with charges and counter charges being levelled, it would seem that trouble had been building within the company for a long time and Miss Woodhams was not altogether little man-goddy-two-times other.

For a start, when Holzman's nose was summarised, the company looked after said, which is absolute disaster for any company.

When Woodhams arrived with his ideas, strict and personal discipline, quite a few ions were trodden on and some dissatisfaction was born. A group of dancers went to Bales with a lot of complaints against Woodhams, when these were brought into the open, tempers flared and so Woodhams fell.

Secondly there was such an outraged reaction to Nutcracker in a City at no Sydney premises that the Board might have put cold feet about it all (not to scratch the nutcracker too hot).

Personally I think Woodhams might have been at fault in dropping the Australian Ballet's oh so conservative, this time audience over the step and of modern dance so abruptly. What was needed (and is still needed) is a gradual weaning away at so as to slowly show that there is something beyond the narrow and quickly exhausted confines of neoclassical modern ballet.

Provided both money and personnel were available they could have built up a star-studded line-up of works that could take audiences on a tour of the entire landscape of what has happened in dance since 1980.

Starting off with perhaps Copelia (and why hasn't they dated off that one, it was always good box office?) they could continue with Pohjola's Scherzo, *Carrousel* and *Perseus*, then Massine's *Les Noces*, Kurt Jooss's *Green Table*, Balanchine's *Apollon* and *Polar* *Tempozempos*, Ashton's *Stephanie* and *Clara*, MacMillan's *Song of the Earth* and, if they worked hard enough, some works by Martha Graham, Jerome Robbins' *Danza* or *Gathering and Prelude to the Mad* afternoon of the *Four* *Ghosts*. There were plans at one stage to get this one but I believe something went wrong and so on with Tchaik, Bourn (La Sylphide), von Meuse (Cesar Pugni) and ending up with say Taylor Flarp (there are plans to have had *July Roads* last year) and of course Australian born choreographers.

All of these mentioned works are of course my list, but I do think they are suitable enough to please a lot of people and to really develop a taste and understanding for modern dance.

Australian audiences rarely (if ever) get a chance to see these great works and the Australian Ballet, of all the dance operations now functioning in this country should be doing its utmost to educating audiences. But I can't see a happening unless some firmly needed weeding out of the obstructive deadwood is achieved.

ARTS COUNCIL OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC.

a division of the Arts Council of Australia

The Arts Council of South Australia is funded through State and Federal sources to encourage and maintain a varied pattern of arts provision throughout the State.

Through its network of 37 branches, whose needs and preferences are taken into account when planning touring repertoire, the Arts Council endeavours to provide even the remotest areas with a balanced programme of activities in the fields of

- Drama
- Music
- Dance
- Crafts
- Visual Arts
- Community Arts
- Lecture Tours
- Schools Holiday Workshops
- Local and ethnic festivals

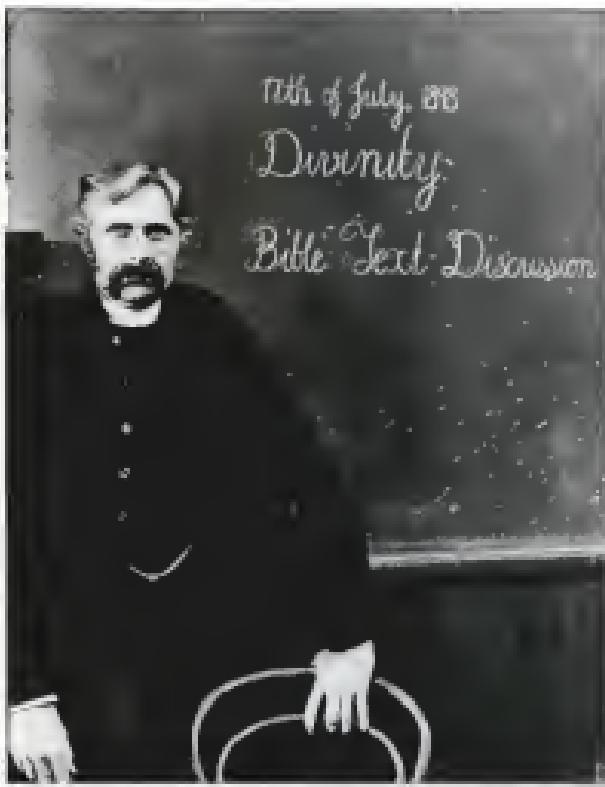
As well as supporting a regular touring schedule by the State Companies — the South Australian Theatre Company, the State Opera of South Australia, the Australian Dance Theatre (supported also by Victoria) and, when not busy in metropolitan schools, the South Australian Theatre Company's Theatre in Education Team — the Arts Council also engages overseas and interstate companies to bring the best of all worlds to country audiences.

Current plans include four by *Peek-a-Boo Puppet Theatre* — 19th September to 28th October; S.A.T.C. — "City Sayer" by Stephen Pollock — 24th October to 19th November; *State Opera of S.A.* — "Gilbert versus Sullivan — the Fight of the Century" — 21st November to 10th December.

Further details from:
The Administrator,
Arts Council of South Australia,
455 Morphett Street, Adelaide, SA 5000
Telephone (08) 212 2644

The Getting of Wisdom

Storm Boy



The Getting of Wisdom. Barry Humphries as the Rev. Mr. Strachey.

Two Australian films with highly contrasted theme and style were launched half way through August. Both are serious, and most reflect a fading confidence into the local industry.

They are *The Getting of Wisdom*, produced by Philip Adams from the novel of the same name by Henry Handel Richardson and the South Australian Film Corporation's *Storm Boy* from the book by Colin Thiele. It's interesting, though perhaps redundant that both these films come from books that are each in its own way exceptional, and were translated into film by gifted scriptwriters.

It's possible it can't be said too often that the film will be only as good as the writing

The Getting of Wisdom is about the impact of a tough schoolboy from the bush on a rather smug young teacher's mentality in Melbourne, and of the teacher's effect on her. The time is 1897, bust of Queen Victoria, and scattered among the jars of pickings, the too-often-coddled brats of the station boys' close class in the dingy corridor, the younger among the teachers are beginning to feel the stirrings of feminism, and the mood of the school is governed by parents and a board of governors that accepts that the rich are always right.

The little country girl is Laura Treadwell, whose mother runs the post office at Warragga, a one street dusty

town. The girls are rough on her clothes and her appearance and try to do her down. She fights back, with superior knowledge gleaned from books, her and play-acting a love affair.

She has the occasional support of one or other of the variable girls, run by every sort of human, and some sympathetic from the assistant head mistress. The remote broadcaster, the Reverend Mr. Strachey, regards her with a kind of appalled interest, as if she were apes on his standard road.

The Getting of Wisdom will inevitably be compared with *Pearl of the Hanging Rock*, just because it is about a girls' school. But there is absolutely no connection, and no similarity in the director's style, camera work or settings (indeed, average film people may find an odd list, three of our best films being about schoolgirls and schoolboys — *From the Corner of Wisdom* and *The Devil's Playground*. *Big* will be noted as a series of parades).

The Getting of Wisdom is a strong, lively, confident film which always knows where it is going. Produced by Philip (John's Party) Adams for Southern Cross Pictures, it is directed by Bruce Beresford and photographed by Don McPhee. The script from the short novel by Henry Handel Richardson is by Gleeson Waugh and in all works very well. One or two sections may inevitably be nixed, but there is nothing to make the hair stand on end.

Southern Cross found their lead in an inexperienced Melbourne girl, Susannah Formby, 18 years old, with a divisive profile, indocile discipline, a sharp voice, boyishly well with all questions that run the rule. One doesn't know what else she can do, but she can certainly do *Jesus*.

Laura/Susannah Formby dominates, as she is meant to. But the script ingeniously places competitors all around her — the Rev. Mr. Strachey, somewhat Dickensian but more spleen or smarminess, played by Barry Humphries, the young cleric, the Rev. Mr. Shepherd, a bally and hysterical (John Waters), two school matrons, Miss Zelieks, romantic and Miss Snodgrass, cynical, played by Candy Raymond and Jan Freyell. Hilary Ryan as the head girl Evelyn, a somewhat Anglo-British girl, rather tall and smooth and beautiful to be true, the built, coarse Lilibeth with her footstool's face and her gash (Kim Demant). There is an appealing portrait of a well-intentioned teacher, Miss Chapman, from Frances Kennedy.

It would be difficult to make a personal film like this without slipping occasionally

into caricature and stereotype. The head mistress (Muriel Halpin) tells visitors to the school, and so does John Waters. Perhaps unexpectedly, Harry Humphries is perfectly in control of his Mr Strachey, in the same time rigid and witty. He never plays for easy laughs.

One of the real attractions of *The Grange of Winslow* (and a stunning exercise in casting) is the gaggle of girls at the boarding school — British, bushwives, tormented and tormented, easily diverted from friendship to enmity, cousins and jealous and overtly “yellow”. They are useful but fascinating.

The *Grange of Winslow* was Henry Handel Richardson's second novel, published in 1919. His old school, PL8, was originally catastrophic and the all-powerful governing body resisted by removing her name from the honour roll.

Stones Bay is an ancient classic, in the category of *The Red Balloon* and that film about the white horses of the Camargue called, I think, *One Horse*. I can imagine Stones Bay encircled in everybody's memory (and still showing in a thousand cinemas around the world) after we have forgotten every Disney work with the possible exception of *Rescuers*.

The film has three credentials for its kind — a simple story, simple objects to love and admire, interesting landscapes. In Stones Bay the simple objects are a 19 year old boy, a fisher, a black man, a pelican, a shark, some boats. The setting is the Coorong, a wild spot in South Australia of fluctuating grandeur and ever changing beauty.

As for the story, it's about a boy who doesn't go to school but runs up and down the marsh alone all day, thinks his father the clearest business in the world, meets a

pelican for companionship, meets a black man named Fingerbone, thinks he might like to go to school, loses his pelican to illegal shooters, resigns himself to having only one parent.

I can't think of anywhere in the world where Stones Bay could not be enjoyed without benefit of translation. Everybody can understand what it is like to shelter from a storm, escape out from a sinking boat, catch a fish, lose an animal, sometimes wait a mother, walk on a beach and eat a plate of beans.

A few subtleties would take over if anyone were considering the relationship of father and son, the lower the better, probably.

The players in the South Australian Film Corporation's picture are Greg Rose as Miles, or Santa Bay, Peter Cummins as Hulaway Tom, the father, Gulpilil as Fingerbone, the black man. Colin Thiele, the South Australian novelist, wrote the book and Santa Bay made a screen play from it. Horn Sutin directed. Matt Carroll produced. Geoff Burton handled the photography and Michael Carlos's music made an appealing match with the images.

The thing to be said at once about Stones Bay is that it is, interesting, about the most interesting quickly a film can have. And the film never loses an audience with beauty or meanness. I suppose Fingerbone is up there, the late black, to reward us for our instant Aboriginal and the environment. But because David Gulpilil is so much his own man, has what a colleague recently called “passions”, and because Horn Sutin directs so sensitively, there is no effect of lecturing. And one of the most attractive elements in the film is Gulpilil's little dance of the cool, angular, proud, energetic with life.

The version of the yabbie is done biggest, crashing down on Hulaway Tom's shack in the dark with presents streaming in the rain while Santa Bay bakes by some packing cases certainly points up the fact that the environment is illustrated by visible actors, but the incident is relevant, excitingly delivered and comes in a stage in the film when anyone afterwards says

As you may have heard, the pelicans, especially the pelican that Miles around with Miles (indeed Miles Festival, rather out of key with the place and people Santa Bay can't read, so where would he have picked up that fancy name?) sing the song. These marvellously intelligent (perhaps anthropomorphically speaking) birds are beautiful in flight, comically digitated on the sand or water, kind to each other, and have the most remarkable black ship eyes, brought prominently to attention by Miles's bigging concern. Production, among the credits is the name of Gordon Noble, Pelican Trainer.

People who eat pink Stones Bay, which has been enjoying a long run in Adelaide, are simply raising the point of the exercise. Colin Thiele took a few simple lines and a bit of philosophy, and one songwriter and director picked them up thematically and visually, and that was it. Films in which the principal performer is a child need to be directed in love with, with the adult actors appropriately pink. Miles (I assume) Peter Cummins's control, and commentary speaks by action participating respectively a singer and a schoolteacher.

I have some doubts as to whether boarding school in Adelaide would be the right place for Miles, in the ending suggests, but I suppose he could always run away.



Webber and Tim Rice. Directed by Barry O'Connell (11-15 Nov.)

EDDINGTON MUNICIPAL OPERA COMPANY (07-08 Nov.)

Teatro (Verdi) in English 18, 19, 25, 26
Non Conductor Cedric Adkins produced and
designed by Bruce Phillips

SEYMOUR CENTRE (07-08 Nov.)

York & Albany Stock Exchange, Broadway
presented by the Young Theatre Company of
Sydney directed by Leander Lee, with Jane
Marshall, Vicki Karpman (7-10 Nov.)

SPEAKEASY THEATRE RESTAURANT

Surry Hills (08-10 Nov.)

The Gold Rush, directed and designed by
Graham Roberts (continuing)

THEATRE ROYAL (21-01-01)

Safe in Hell, by Stephen Sondheim, directed by
Barry Cook, designed by Peter Doherty (part),
Vivian Alexander (part), women's
costumes designed by Roger Goss (part), Robert
Urgo and created by Kay Wilson. With Jeff
Perryman, Bartholemew John, Christopher
Matthew, John Lowe (10 Nov.)

The 25th and All That Jazz, by Stephen
Sondheim. A 1950 musical directed by Michael
Tyree, choreographed, Michael Pugner, designed
by Bruce Allen with John Chapman, Christopher
Matthew, John C Murphy (22 Nov.)

WHITE HORSE HOTEL, Surry Hills (21-01-01)

A Jester's Number, by Eric Mottram, produced
by Peter Stevens and Malcolm Freely

QUEENSLAND

ABC TELEVISION (16-17 Nov.)

Night Man's Ball by Andrew Williams. Directed by
Jonathan Ball (16-17 Nov.)

The Man Who Came to Dinner by Kaufman and
Hart. Directed by Jason Sudeikis (17 Nov.)

Children's matinée. The Emperor's
Nightmare written and directed by Alan Fron-
cay

Mr Nobbody written and directed by Eugene
Hickey (Opened 12 Nov.)

LA BOITE (06-07 Dec.)

Over Easy by Ross Maysky. Directed by
David Bell (10 Nov.)

Timor - a co-operative production directed by
Richard Pechengian, John O'Toole, Rick
Balding, Hugh Lane and others (Opened 11 Nov.)

Love Me Like You Mean It by Simon
Webbe. Directed by Ross Maysky (1 Nov.)

Men of Steel, A Middle Ages production
(Opened 20 Nov.)

A special project by the Early Childhood
Drama Project. Big (Opened 21 Nov.)

CAMERATA (06-07 Dec.)

Avant Theatre
The Royal Pains by John Arden and
Marguerite D'Arcy. Directed by Cathie
Hurley (Opened 17 Nov.)

HER MAJESTY'S (22-27 Nov.)

The Pleasure of His Company by Samuel
Taylor and Dorothy Day. Directed with
Douglas Fowles (1-5 Nov.)

Belle Theatre (Queensland) (5-12 Nov.)

Australian Opera. Puritans by Beaumarchais

Directed by John Copley. Designed by Alan
Lam

QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY

(22-31 Nov.)

Midwives designed by Sutton Gray. Directed
by Alan Atkins, designed by Peter Cooker.
With John Keanan and Pat Bishop (To 12
Nov.)

Confidence by Alan Ayckbourn. Directed by
Murray Fox, designed by James Redmond

THEATRE NIGHT (22-23 Nov.)

The Black Fawn Lady a screwball and staged
by Ian Lord (1-11 Nov.)

Something's A'goin' to Happen by James McDonald, David

West and Robert Gottsch. Directed by John

Wainwright (Opened 18 Nov.)

SING THAI SIBALAI

(11-18 Dec.)

Three Gold Boxes by Alan Ayckbourn. Directed by
Stephen Monday. Directed by Jim Vlach (10 Nov.)

Adelaide Theatre Group. Drury by Anthony

Hurst. Directed by Alan Marshall (25-26
Nov.)

Blue Heeler, You're More Alive by Ian Ross

and

Three River Gorges in Three Sets by Steve J
Sparks. Directed by Simon Brown (10 Nov. 2
Dec.)

Q-THEATRE

Anytime, Anywhere, Anyplace by John Van
Ryden. Directed by Lio Hafnerman (Week 1 to Sat 2-16 Nov.)

REDFINED

Tramps Finally by Alan Da Gama. Directed
by Bruce Allen (Thurs. to Sun 3-10 Nov.)

SHED DAN THEATRE

Adelaide Theatre Group. Alpine Gothic. Robert
Reilly, music by Lari Ward. Directed by
Michael Borsarić (Wed. to Sat 23 Nov. to
Dec. 1)

STUDIO AL-SIBALAIAN THEATRE
COMPANY (01-03 Dec.)

Playhouse, Macbeth by William Shakespeare

Directed by Colin George (01 Dec. 10 Nov.)

A. Street and Mary Charlotte by John

O'Donnell. Directed by Ross Blair. Designed
by John Corcoran (Opened 1 Dec.)

STUDIO OPERA (01-10 Dec.)

The Opera Theatre (formerly the Mayfield's)
One German Major, Captain Major Paul
and director Adam Shal (01 Nov.)

ENSWAGA

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